

Contents

<u>The Authors</u>	22	Embassies & Consulates	96
<u>Getting Started</u>	28	Festivals & Events	96
<u>Itineraries</u>	33	Internet Resources	96
<u>Snapshot</u>	37	Maps	96
<u>History</u>	39	Money	96
<u>The Culture</u>	50	Telephone	96
<u>Environment</u>	60	Time	96
<u>South Pacific Diving</u>	69	Tourist Information	96
<u>Food & Drink</u>	79	Visas	96
<u>Easter Island</u>	84	TRANSPORT IN EASTER ISLAND	97
Climate & When to Go	85	Getting There & Away	97
History	85	Getting Around	97
The Culture	87	Federated States of Micronesia	98
Arts	88	Climate & When to Go	99
Language	88	History	99
Environment	88	The Culture	101
HANGA ROA	88	Arts	102
Orientation	88	Language	102
Information	88	Environment	102
Transport	90	KOSRAE	103
Sights	90	Orientation	103
Activities	92	Information	104
Easter Island for Children	92	Transport	104
Tours	92	Tofol	105
Sleeping	92	Lelu Island	105
Eating	93	Malem	106
Drinking	94	Utwe	107
Entertainment	94	Airport to Lelu	107
Shopping	94	Tafunsak	107
EASTER ISLAND DIRECTORY	94	Activities	107
Accommodation	94	Kosrae for Children	108
Activities	95	Tours	109
Business Hours	95	Sleeping	109
		Eating	109
		Shopping	109
		POHNPEI	109
		Orientation	110
		Information	110
		Transport	110
		Kolonia	111
		Porakiet Village	113
		Sokehs Island	113
		Around Pohnpei	113
		Nan Madol	114
		Islands in Pohnpei	115
		Lagoon	115
		Outer Atolls	116
		Activities	116

Pohnpei for Children	117
Tours	117
Sleeping	117
Eating	118
Drinking	118
Shopping	119
CHUUK	119
Orientation	120
Information	120
Dangers & Annoyances	120
Transport	121
Weno	121
Islands In Chuuk Lagoon	123
Outer Islands	124
Activities	124
Chuuk for Children	124
Tours	125
Sleeping	125
Eating	125
Shopping	126
YAP	126
Orientation	127
Information	127
Transport	128
Colonia	128
Balabat Village	129
German Cable Station & Japanese Zeroes	129
Okau Village	129
Wanyan	130
Bechial	130
Outer Islands	130
Activities	131
Yap for Children	131
Tours	131
Sleeping	132
Eating	133
Drinking	133
Shopping	133
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA DIRECTORY	134
Accommodation	134
Activities	134
Business Hours	134
Children	134
Embassies & Consulates	134
Festivals & Events	134
Internet Resources	135
Money	135
Time	135
Visas	135
TRANSPORT IN THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA	135

Getting There & Away	135
Getting Around	135

Fiji

136

Climate & When to Go	138
History	138
The Culture	141
Religion	143
Arts	143
Language	144
Environment	145
VITI LEVU	146
Orientation	146
Information	146
Dangers & Annoyances	147
Transport	147
Viti Levu for Children	150
Tours	151
Nadi	151
Lautoka	158
Southern Viti Levu & The Coral Coast	160
Offshore Islands	166
Suva	166
Viti Levu's Kings Road	175
Viti Levu Highlands	177
Sigatoka Valley	178
Namosi Highlands	178
MAMANUCA GROUP	178
South Sea Island	180
Bounty Island	180
Beachcomber Island	181
Treasure Island	181
Navini	181
Malololailai	181
Malolo	182
Castaway Island	182
Mana	183
Matamanoa	183
Tokoriki	184
Tavarua	184
Namotu	184
YASAWA GROUP	184
Kuata	186
Wayasewa	186
Waya	186
Naviti & Around	187
Tavewa	187
Nacula	188
Nanuya Lailai	189
Matacawalevu	189
Sawa-i-Lau	189
ROTUMA	189
Transport	189

Sleeping & Eating	189
OVALAU & THE LOMAIVITI GROUP	190
Levuka	190
Caqalai	193
Leleuvia	193
Naigani	193
Namenalala	194
VANUA LEVU	194
Savusavu	195
Tunuloa Peninsula	199
Labasa & Around	199
Kioa	200
TAVEUNI	200
Waiyevo, Somosomo & Around	202
Southern Taveuni	204
Matei & Around	204
Eastern Taveuni	206
Offshore Islands	206
KADAVU	207
Dangers & Annoyances	207
Activities	207
Transport	207
Sleeping	207
LAU GROUP	209
Vanua Balavu	209
FIJI DIRECTORY	209
Accommodation	209
Activities	210
Business Hours	211
Children	211
Embassies & Consulates	211
Festivals & Events	211
Internet Access	211
Internet Resources	211
Maps	212
Money	212
Telephone	212
Time	213
Tourist Information in Fiji	213
Visas	213
TRANSPORT IN FIJI	213
Getting There & Away	213
Getting Around	214

Guam

217

Climate & When to Go	218
History	219
The Culture	220
Arts	221
Language	221
Environment	221
Orientation	222

Information	222
Dangers & Annoyances	222
Hagåtña	223
Tumon Bay	225
Northern Guam	225
West Coast	227
Southern Guam	228
East Coast	230
Activities	231
Guam for Children	232
Tours	232
Sleeping	233
Eating	234
Drinking	236
Entertainment	237
Shopping	237
GUAM DIRECTORY	237
Accommodation	237
Activities	238
Business Hours	239
Embassies & Consulates	239
Festivals & Events	239
Internet Resources	239
Money	239
Time	239
Visas	239
TRANSPORT IN GUAM	239
Getting There & Away	239
Getting Around	240

Kiribati 241

Climate & When to Go	242
History	242
The Culture	245
Religion	245
Arts	245
Language	246
Environment	247
TARAWA ATOLL	247
Orientation	247
Information	248
Transport	249
Sights	250
Activities	251
Sleeping & Eating	252
Drinking	254
Entertainment	254
Shopping	254
OUTER ISLANDS	255
Outer Gilbert Islands	255
Line Islands	258
Phoenix Islands	262
KIRIBATI DIRECTORY	262
Accommodation	262

Activities	262
Books	262
Business Hours	262
Children	263
Embassies & Consulates	263
Internet Access	263
Internet Resources	263
Maps	263
Money	263
Telephone	263
Time	264
Tourist Information	264
Visas	264
Women Travellers	264
TRANSPORT IN KIRIBATI	264
Getting There & Away	264
Getting Around	265

Marshall Islands 266

Climate & When to Go	267
History	267
The Culture	269
Religion	270
Arts	270
Language	271
Environment	271
MAJURO ATOLL	271
Orientation	272
Information	272
Transport	272
D-U-D Municipality	273
Activities	275
Sleeping	275
Eating	276
Drinking	277
Entertainment	277
Shopping	278
KWAJALEIN ATOLL	278
Kwajalein Island	278
Ebeye	278
OUTER ISLANDS	280
Arno Atoll	281
Bikini Atoll	281
Enewetok Atoll	282
Jaluit Atoll	282
Likiep Atoll	283
Maloelap Atoll	283
Mili Atoll	283
Rongelap Atoll	283
Wotje Atoll	284
MARSHALL ISLANDS DIRECTORY	284
Accommodation	284
Activities	284

Books	285
Business Hours	285
Children	285
Embassies & Consulates	285
Festivals & Events	285
Internet Access	285
Internet Resources	285
Money	285
Telephone	286
Time	286
Tourist Information	
In the RMI	286
Visas	286
TRANSPORT IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS	286
Getting There & Away	286
Getting Around	286

Nauru 288

Climate & When to Go	289
History	289
The Culture	291
Language	293
Environment	293
Orientation	293
Sights & Activities	293
Sleeping & Eating	294
NAURU DIRECTORY	294
Accommodation	294
Books	294
Business Hours	294
Embassies & Consulates	294
Internet Access	295
Internet Resources	295
Money	295
Telephone	295
Time	295
Visas	295
TRANSPORT IN NAURU	295
Getting There & Away	295
Getting Around	295

New Caledonia 296

Climate & When to Go	297
History	297
The Culture	299
Sport	300
Arts	300
Language	309
Environment	309
NOUMEA	310
Orientation	310
Information	311

Transport	311
Noumea Walking Tour	313
Place des Cocotiers	314
Musée de la Ville de NoumEa	314
Cathédrale St Joseph	314
Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie	314
Mwâ Ka	314
Le Marché	315
Musée de l'Histoire Maritime	315
Parc Zoologique et Forestier	315
Tjibaou Cultural Centre	315
Aquarium	315
Le Petit Train	315
Beaches	315
Around Noumea	315
Activities	316
Noumea for Children	316
Tours	317
Sleeping	317
Eating	318
Drinking	320
Entertainment	320
Shopping	321
GRANDE TERRE	321
The Far South	321
Central Grande Terre	324
Northwest Coast	327
Northeast Coast	329
LOYALTY ISLANDS	332
Maré	332
Lifou	335
Ouvéa	339
ÎLE DES PINS	342
Orientation & Information	342
Dangers & Annoyances	342
Transport	342
Getting Around	342
Vao	342
Kuto	344
North of Kuto	344
North of Vao	345
Tours	345
Sleeping & Eating	345
Shopping	347
NEW CALEDONIA DIRECTORY	347
Accommodation	347
Activities	347
Business Hours	349
Children	349
Dangers & Annoyances	349
Embassies & Consulates	349

Festivals & Events	350
Internet Access	350
Internet Resources	350
Maps	350
Money	350
Telephone	351
Time	351
Tourist Information in New Caledonia	351
Visas	351
TRANSPORT IN NEW CALEDONIA	351
Getting There & Away	351
Getting Around	353

Niue 356

Climate & When to Go	357
History	357
The Culture	357
Arts	358
Language	359
Environment	359
Alofi	360
Around the Island	360
Activities	362
Niue for Children	362
Tours	363
Sleeping	363
Eating & Drinking	364
NIUE DIRECTORY	365
Books	365
Business Hours	365
Festivals & Events	365
Internet Access	366
Internet Resources	366
Maps	366
Medical Services	366
Money	366
Post	366
Telephone	366
Time	366
Tourist Information	366
Travel Agencies	367
Visas	367
TRANSPORT IN NIUE	367
Getting There & Away	367
Getting Around	367

Northern Mariana Islands 368

Climate & When to Go	369
History	369
The Culture	371

Arts	371
Language	371
Environment	372
SAIPAN	372
Orientation	372
Information	373
Dangers & Annoyances	373
Transport	374
Garapan	375
Mañagaha Island	377
Northern Saipan	377
Cross-Island Road	379
East-Coast Beaches	379
Southern Saipan	379
Activities	380
Saipan for Children	380
Tours	380
Sleeping	381
Eating	382
Drinking	382
Entertainment	382
Shopping	382
TINIAN	382
Orientation	383
Information	383
Transport	383
Sights	383
Activities	386
Sleeping	386
Eating & Entertainment	386
ROTA	386
Orientation	387
Information	387
Transport	387
Sights	387
Activities	389
Sleeping	389
Eating	390
Shopping	390
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS DIRECTORY	390
Accommodation	390
Activities	390
Business Hours	390
Children	391
Embassies & Consulates	391
Festivals & Events	391
Internet Resources	391
Money	391
Telephone	391
Time	391
Visas	391
TRANSPORT IN THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS	392

Getting There & Away	392
Getting Around	392

Palau 393

Climate & When to Go	394
History	395
The Culture	396
Sport	396
Arts	397
Language	397
Environment	397
KOROR STATE	398
Orientation	398
Information	398
Transport	399
Koror Island	400
Malakal Island	401
Arakabesang Island	401
Activities	401
Palau for Children	402
Tours	402
Sleeping	402
Eating	403
Drinking	404
Shopping	404
ROCK ISLANDS	404
Transport	404
Sights	405
Activities	405
Tours	406
Sleeping	406
BABELDAOB	407
Geography	407
Transport	407
Sights	408
Activities & Tours	409
Sleeping	409
PELELIU	410
Transport	410
Sights	411
Activities	412
Tours	412
Sleeping	412
Eating	413
ANGAUR	413
Transport	413
Sights & Activities	413
Sleeping & Eating	414
KAYANGEL	415
SOUTH-WEST ISLANDS	415
PALAU DIRECTORY	416
Accommodation	416
Activities	416
Business Hours	416

Children	416
Embassies & Consulates	416
Festivals & Events	416
Holidays	417
Internet Access	417
Internet Resources	417
Money	417
Telephone	417
Time	417
Visas	417
TRANSPORT IN PALAU	417
Getting There & Away	417
Getting Around	417

Pitcairn Island 419

Climate & When to Go	420
History	420
The Culture	420
Religion	422
Language	422
Environment	422
PITCAIRN ISLAND	422
History	422
Sights	426
Sleeping	426
Shopping	426
Getting Around	426
OTHER ISLANDS	427
Oeno Island	427
Henderson Island	427
Ducie Atoll	428
PITCAIRN ISLAND DIRECTORY	428
Accommodation	428
Internet Resources	428
Money	429
Telephone & Fax	429
Time	429
Visas	429
TRANSPORT IN PITCAIRN ISLAND	429
Getting There & Away	429
Getting Around	430

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands 431

Climate & When to Go	432
History	432
The Culture	432
Arts	434
Language	435
Environment	435
RAROTONGA	436

History	436
Orientation	436
Information	437
Transport	437
Avarua	440
Around the Island	441
Activities	444
Rarotonga for Children	445
Tours	446
Sleeping	447
Eating	450
Drinking & Entertainment	452
Shopping	453
AITUTAKI	454
History	454
Orientation	454
Information	454
Transport	454
Around the Island	456
Activities	456
Tours	457
Sleeping	457
Eating	458
Drinking & Entertainment	459
Shopping	459
PALMERSTON	460
'ATIU	460
History	460
Information	460
Transport	460
Sights	461
Tours	462
Sleeping	462
Eating	463
Drinking & Entertainment	463
Shopping	463
MA'UKE	463
Information	463
Transport	463
Sights	464
Tours	465
Sleeping	465
Eating & Drinking	465
MITIARO	465
Information	465
Transport	466
Sights	466
Sleeping & Eating	467
MANGAIA	467
History	467
Orientation	467
Information	468
Transport	468
Sights	468

Tours	469
Sleeping	469
Eating & Drinking	469
Shopping	469
NORTHERN GROUP	470
Transport	470
Manihiki	470
Rakahanga	470
Penrhyn	470
Pukapuka	471
Suvarrow	471
RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS DIRECTORY	471
Accommodation	471
Activities	471
Business Hours	472
Children	472
Customs	472
Dangers & Annoyances	472
Embassies & Consulates	472
Festivals & Events	473
Holidays	473
Internet Access	473
Internet Resources	473
Money	473
Photography & Video	474
Post	474
Telephone	474
Time	474
Tourist Information	474
Visas	475
TRANSPORT ON RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS	475
Getting There & Away	475
Getting Around	476

Samoa 477

Climate & When to Go	478
History	478
The Culture	480
Sport	482
Arts	482
Language	483
Environment	484
'UPOLU	485
Orientation	485
Information	485
Transport	487
Apia	488
Robert Louis Stevenson Museum & Mt Vaea Scenic Reserve	492
Bahá'í House of Worship	492
Lake Lanoto'o	493
Papapapai-tai Falls	493

Fatumea Pool	493
Uafato Conservation Area	493
Aleipata Beaches & Reefs	493
To Sua Ocean Trench	493
Sopo'aga Falls	494
Togitogiga Recreation Reserve	494
O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park	494
South Coast Beaches & Reefs	494
Papasee'a Sliding Rock	495
Manono	495
Apolima	495
Activities	496
'Upolu for Children	497
Tours	497
Sleeping	497
Eating	500
Drinking	502
Entertainment	502
Shopping	503
SAVAI'I	503
Information	503
Transport	504
Salelologa	506
East Coast Beaches	506
Lava Field	506
Turtles	506
Mt Matavanu Crater & Dwarf's Cave	506
Mata'olealelo Spring	507
Pe'ape'a Cave	507
A'opo Conservation Area & Mt Silisili	507
Falealupo Peninsula	507
Alofaaga Blowholes	508
Afu Aau Falls	508
Pulemelei Mound	508
Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve	508
Activities	509
Tours	509
Sleeping	509
Eating & Drinking	511
SAMOA DIRECTORY	511
Accommodation	511
Activities	512
Business Hours	513
Children	513
Embassies & Consulates	513
Festivals & Events	514
Internet Access	514
Internet Resources	514
Maps	514
Money	514

Telephone	515
Time	515
Visas	515
TRANSPORT IN SAMOA	516
Getting There & Away	516
Getting Around	517

American Samoa 519

Climate & When to Go	520
History	520
The Culture	521
Arts	521
Language	521
Environment	521
TUTUILA	522
Orientation	522
Information	524
Transport	524
Pago Pago	525
Rainmaker Mountain	527
National Park of American Samoa	527
Eastern Beaches	528
Masefau & Sa'ilele	528
Aunu'u	528
Matafao Peak	528
Tia Seu Lupe	528
Turtle & Shark Site	529
Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary	529
Leone	529
Massacre Bay	529
Cape Taputapu	530
Activities	530
Tutuila for Children	530
Tours	531
Sleeping	531
Eating	532
Drinking	533
Entertainment	533
Shopping	533
MANU'A ISLANDS	534
Information	534
Transport	534
Ofu	534
Olosega	535
Ta'U	535
Activities	536
Sleeping & Eating	536
AMERICAN SAMOA DIRECTORY	537
Accommodation	537
Activities	537
Business Hours	538

Children	538
Embassies & Consulates	538
Festivals & Events	538
Internet Access	538
Internet Resources	538
Maps	538
Money	539
Telephone	539
Time	539
Visas	539
TRANSPORT IN AMERICAN SAMOA	540
Getting There & Away	540
Getting Around	540

Solomon Islands 542

Climate & When to Go	544
History	544
The Culture	546
Religion	547
Arts	548
Language	549
Environment	549
GUADALCANAL	550
Orientation	551
Information	551
Dangers & Annoyances	552
Transport	552
Honiara	553
Tours	555
Sleeping	555
Eating	556
Drinking & Entertainment	556
Shopping	557
East of Honiara	557
West of Honiara	557
Weathercoast	557
CENTRAL PROVINCE	557
Nggela Islands	557
Savo	558
Russell Islands	558
WESTERN PROVINCE	558
Ghizo	559
Islands Around Ghizo	562
New Georgia Island	562
Marovo Lagoon	564
RENNELL & BELLONA PROVINCE	567
Rennell Island	567
Bellona	568
MALAITA PROVINCE	569
Malaita Island	569
SOLOMON ISLANDS DIRECTORY	572

Accommodation	572
Activities	573
books	574
Business Hours	574
Children	574
Dangers & Annoyances	574
Embassies & Consulates	574
Festivals & Events	575
Internet Access	575
Internet Resources	575
Maps	575
Money	575
Telephone	576
Time	576
Tourist Information in the Solomon Islands	576
Visas	576
Women Travellers	576
TRANSPORT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS	577
Getting There & Away	577
Getting Around	577

Tahiti & French Polynesia 579

Climate & When to Go	581
History	581
The Culture	585
Arts	586
Language	588
Environment	589
TAHITI	590
Orientation	590
Information	591
Transport	591
Pape'ete	595
Around Tahiti Nui	596
Tahiti Iti	597
Activities	597
Tahiti for Children	600
Tours	600
Sleeping	600
Eating	601
Drinking	603
Entertainment	604
Shopping	604
MO'OREA	604
Orientation	604
Information	606
Transport	606
Coastal Road	606
Paopao & Opunohu Valleys	607
Activities	607
Sleeping	608

Eating	609
Drinking	610
Entertainment	610
Shopping	610
HUAHINE	610
Orientation	612
Information	612
Transport	612
Huahine Nui	612
Huahine Iti	621
Activities	621
Tours	622
Sleeping	622
Eating	623
Drinking	623
RA'IA TEA & TAHA'A	623
Ra'iatea	626
Taha'a	629
BORA BORA	631
Orientation	631
Information	631
Transport	631
Sights	634
Activities	634
Sleeping	635
Eating	637
Drinking & Entertainment	638
Shopping	639
MAUPITI	639
Orientation & Information	640
Transport	640
Sights	640
Activities	641
Sleeping & Eating	641
TUAMOTU ISLANDS	642
Rangiroa	642
Tikehau	647
Mataiva	648
Manihi	648
Ahe	650
Takaroa & Takapoto	650
Fakarava	650
MARQUESAS ISLANDS	651
Nuku Hiva	652
'Ua Huka	655
'Ua Pou	657
Hiva Oa	658
Tahuata	661
Fatu Hiva	662
AUSTRAL ISLANDS	662
Rurutu	663
Raivavae	665
THE GAMBIER ARCHIPELAGO	665
Orientation & Information	665

Transport	666
Sights & Activities	666
Sleeping & Eating	666
TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA DIRECTORY	666
Accommodation	666
Activities	668
Business Hours	669
Children	669
Embassies & Consulates	670
Festivals & Events	670
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	671
Internet Access	671
Internet Resources	671
Money	671
Telephone	672
Time	672
Tourist Information in Tahiti & French Polynesia	672
Visas	672
Women Travellers	673
TRANSPORT IN TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA	673
Getting There & Away	673
Getting Around	675

Tokelau **679**

Climate & When to Go	680
History	680
The Culture	681
Sport	682
Religion	683
Language	683
Environment	683
Food & Drink	684
TOKELAU DIRECTORY	684
Accommodation	684
Activities	685
Internet Resources	685
Money	685
Telephone	685
Time	685
Visas	686
TRANSPORT IN TOKELAU	686
Getting There & Away	686
Getting Around	686

Tonga **687**

Climate & When to Go	688
History	688
The Culture	690
Religion	690
Arts	691

Language	691
Environment	691
TONGATAPU	692
Information	692
Transport	694
Nuku'alofa	695
Around the Island	703
Offshore Islands & Reefs	704
HA'APAI GROUP	707
Lifuka Group	708
Other Ha'apai Group Islands	711
VAVA'U GROUP	712
Neiafu	714
Around Vava'u	721
Southern Vava'u Islands	722
Eastern Vava'u Islands	723
THE NIUAS	724
Niuatoputapu	724
Niuafu'ou	725
TONGA DIRECTORY	725
Accommodation	725
Activities	725
Books	726
Business Hours	727
Children	727
Dangers & Annoyances	727
Embassies & Consulates	727
Festivals & Events	727
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	728
Holidays	728
Internet Access	728
Internet Resources	728
Money	728
Telephone	728
Time	729
Tourist Information in Tonga	729
Visas	729
TRANSPORT IN TONGA	729
Getting There & Away	729
Getting Around	730

Tuvalu **732**

Climate & When to Go	733
History	733
The Culture	735
Sport	736
Religion	737
Arts	737
Language	738
Environment	738
FUNAFUTI ATOLL	739
Orientation	739

Information	739
Transport	739
Fongafale Islet	741
Fongafale by Bicycle	742
Around Funafuti	742
Sleeping	743
Eating	743
Drinking	744
Shopping	744
OUTER ISLANDS	744
Nukufetau Atoll	744
Vaitupu	745
Nui Atoll	746
Nanumaga Atoll	746
Niutao Atoll	746
Nanumea Atoll	746
Nukulaelae Atoll	746
Niulakita	747
TUVALU DIRECTORY	747
Accommodation	747
Activities	747
Books	747
Business Hours	747
Children	747
Embassies & Consulates	747
Festivals & Events	748
Internet Access	748
Internet Resources	748
Money	748
Telephone	748
Tourist Information	749
Time	749
Visas	749
TRANSPORT IN TUVALU	749
Getting There & Away	749
Getting Around	749

US Territories **751**

HOWLAND ISLAND	752
BAKER ISLAND	752
JARVIS ISLAND	753
PALMYRA ATOLL	753
KINGMAN REEF	753
JOHNSTON ATOLL	754
WAKE ATOLL	754

Vanuatu **755**

Climate & When to Go	757
History	757
The Culture	759
Arts	761
Language	762
Environment	763

EFATE	764
Information	764
Transport	766
Port Vila	766
Around Efate	775
Nguna	776
EPI	777
TANNA	779
Mt Yasur	781
West Tanna	781
East Tanna	782
MALEKULA	785
The Dog's Head	787
Eastern Malekula	787
The Southeast Coast	788
The Maskelynes	789
South West Bay	789
AMBRYM	789
Volcanoes	790
West Ambrym	791
South Ambrym	792
East Ambrym	792
North Ambrym	792
ESPIRITU SANTO	793
Luganville	796
Around Luganville	799
Northeast Santo	800
West Santo	800
PENTECOST	801
Northern Pentecost	802
Southern Pentecost	802
VANUATU DIRECTORY	804
Accommodation	804
Activities	805
Business Hours	805
Children	805
Embassies & Consulates	805
Festivals & Events	806
Internet Access	806
Internet Resources	806
Money	806
Telephone & Fax	807
Time	807
Tourist Information	807
Visas	807
TRANSPORT IN VANUATU	808
Getting There & Away	808
Getting Around	808

Wallis & Futuna	810
Climate & When to Go	811
History	811

The Culture	811
Religion	812
Arts	813
Language	813
Environment	813
WALLIS ISLAND	814
Information	814
Transport	814
Mata'utu	815
Around the Island	815
Around the Lagoon	816
Activities	816
Wallis for Children	816
Sleeping	816
Eating & Drinking	817
FUTUNA & ALOFI	817
Leava	817
WALLIS & FUTUNA DIRECTORY	819
Accommodation	819
Activities	819
Business Hours	819
Children	819
Embassies & Consulates	819
Festivals & Events	820
Internet Access	820
Internet Resources	820
Money	820
Telephone	820
Time	820
Visas	820
TRANSPORT IN WALLIS & FUTUNA	820
Getting There & Away	820
Getting Around	821

South Pacific Directory	822
Accommodation	822
Activities	824
Business Hours	826
Children	826
Climate Charts	827
Dangers & Annoyances	827
Disabled Travellers	828
Embassies & Consulates	828
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	829
Holidays	829
Insurance	829
Internet Access	829
Money	830
Post	832

Telephone	832
Time	833
Tourist Information	833
Visas	833
Work	834

Transport in the South Pacific 835

GETTING THERE & AWAY	835
Air	835
Sea	840
Tours	840
GETTING AROUND	840
Air	840
Boat	841
Local Transport	843
Tours	844

Health 845

BEFORE YOU GO	845
Insurance	845
Recommended Vaccinations	845
Medical Checklist	846
Internet Resources	846
Further Reading	847
IN TRANSIT	847
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	847
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	847
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC	847
Availability & Cost of Health Care	847
Infectious Diseases	849
Traveller's Diarrhoea	850
Environmental Hazards	851
Traditional Medicine	853

Glossary 854

Behind the Scenes 858

Index 868

World Time Zones 883

Map Legend 884

Getting Started

There's nothing quite like daydreaming about long, white beaches, long, cool drinks and long days lying in the sun. But to lose your head in the clouds and end up arriving in the South Pacific with no preparation is folly. With a good plan, you won't break the bank every time you hop from one Pacific nation to the next, you'll know which islands are easily accessible and which are way off track, and you'll know where to find the best match – not just for your wallet but also for your style.

We've outlined the basics to get you going and to help you get the most out of your Pacific dream, including tips on when to go to avoid cyclones, what to bring and how much it's going to cost. The South Pacific is varied enough to accommodate travellers on all budgets – we'll give you the lowdown on when, where and how.

WHEN TO GO

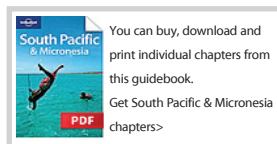
Most visitors to the Pacific time their visit according to the weather. Specifically, they avoid the wet season, when rain is dumped in either isolated showers or seasonal deluges. As the region is in the tropics, the temperature doesn't vary much – it's *always* hot – but during the wet season, heat, humidity and persistent rain can combine to make things sticky and uncomfortable. It's also the time when most cyclones hit and when some places may be impossible to reach due to boggy road conditions. On the other hand, most of the rain falls at night, and the wet season is the time when other tourists will not accompany you in great numbers (not that that's a huge issue in many Pacific countries).

South of the equator, the wet season is from November to April; the dry season runs from May to October. These seasons are basically

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

The usual advice about travelling light doesn't apply so much to the Pacific – bring everything you need as you may not be able to buy it. Consider the following:

- Check visas (p833), vaccinations (p845), and travel and cyclone warnings (opposite).
- Photocopy important documents – leave one copy at home and take another with you.
- Put plastic carry bags or bin liners inside your luggage to keep things dry in a downpour.
- Pack your International Diving Certificate.
- Hat, sunglasses, high-UV-protection sunscreen and rash vest.
- Antiseptic for treating coral cuts (p846).
- Insect repellent and mosquito net (see the boxed text, p848).
- Mask and snorkel – invaluable for impromptu underwater investigations.
- Stout walking shoes or old sneakers (trainers) for razor-sharp coral tracks.
- Light sweater for boats and backs of 4WDs.
- Umbrella or raincoat (poncho-style is good for backpacking).
- A torch (flashlight) for exploring caves and waiting for electricity to return.
- A book or three.
- Earplugs, or something to whack the 4am roosters.



reversed north of the equator, ie in Micronesia. For more on climate, see p61.

Another factor to consider is school-holiday times in Pacific-rim countries such as Australia and New Zealand (NZ). The busiest time of the year in the Cook Islands, for example, is during NZ school holidays. At Christmas, flights and boats to many island nations are fully booked by islanders returning home to spend time with their families.

During peak tourist times, prices can be high, accommodation fully booked and planes packed. You'll find better deals and fewer crowds in the shoulder seasons (either side of the dry season) in October and May. The Climate & When to Go sections in individual country chapters explain what to expect and when to expect it, and the Climate Charts (p827) will help you compare the weather in different destinations.

You might want to time your trip for a major local festival or celebration. Use the boxed text, p31, as a guideline, and also see the Festivals & Events sections in the individual country chapters.

Despite appearances to the contrary, things can change quickly in the Pacific. A cyclone can knock out all accommodation (not to mention roads, electricity and telephone services) and local disputes can close off an area. The number-one rule when planning and travelling is to be flexible. The Pacific attitude to time is more relaxed than in many Western cultures, so don't set your heart on getting to destinations or getting things done in any great hurry (see Time, p833).

It's worth checking for cyclones before you head off on a Pacific holiday. Try the websites of the **Joint Typhoon Warning Centre Hawai'i** (www.npmoc.navy.mil/jtwc.html) or the **Fiji Meteorological Service** (www.met.gov.fj). For more details on cyclones, see p61.

Check, too, the travel advisories published by some governments. These warnings will alert you to any countries considered unsafe, usually due to political unrest or natural disasters. The Foreign Affairs departments in Australia (<http://smartraveller.gov.au>) and Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca/dest) both issue advisories, as does the **British Foreign and Commonwealth Office** (www.fco.gov.uk).

COSTS & MONEY

Brace yourself – the Pacific is *not* a bargain paradise. Getting there, getting around, accommodation and food are all relatively expensive, due largely to two facts: first, compared with other parts of the world, the Pacific has few tourists, and, secondly, huge expanses of vast blue ocean separate most of the nations. Travel costs are high – whether by car, plane or speedboat – due to over-the-top fuel prices and enormous distances. Much of the food is imported and is therefore pricey. In remote areas transport costs force food prices up even further.

Despite all this, travellers on all budgets – big or small – find their way, and with a bit of planning you'll quickly discover that costs vary enormously from one country to another. You may opt for stinger destinations such as French Polynesia and New Caledonia, cheapies such as Samoa and Fiji, or any of the others in between. Backpackers can live like a monk (or a nun) in Tahiti (camping or staying in a guesthouse dormitory and eating bread and cheese) and will still run up a bill of about US\$75 per day. Travel cheaply in Fiji and you'll need at least US\$35 per day. Midrange travellers eating out most days and sleeping in hotels can expect a daily budget starting from US\$80/200 in Fiji/Tahiti. Travellers opting for full-course restaurant meals and resort-style accommodation will be looking at US\$150/500.

'You might want to time your trip for a major local festival'

Ways to stretch your money are numerous. Careful planning will cut travel costs – consider a round-the-world ticket (p836), an air pass (p837) or a package holiday (p840). Don't automatically discount the latter – they can be a great way to acclimatise for a few days before going it alone. Accommodation is the next biggest expense; for a rundown of regional options, costs and money-saving strategies, see p822. Accommodation with a kitchen is one way to cut costs. If you are preparing your own food, avoid expensive tinned goods in favour of locally grown fruit and vegetables. Markets are usually the best way to buy any kind of fresh produce.

Once you're in a country, hiring a bicycle or hitchhiking (p843) is worth considering. On some remote islands, hitching is the only option. And remember: the more time you spend in any one place, the lower your daily expenses are likely to be as you get to know your way around. Activities such as scuba diving will push costs up considerably, but if you're content to snorkel, the underwater world is yours for next to nothing, particularly if you bring your own mask and snorkel.

A general warning about the prices we list in this book: they're likely to change, usually in an upward direction, but if the last holiday season was particularly slow or the local economy crashes, they may remain the same or even come down a bit. See p830 for more details on handling money matters in the South Pacific.

READING UP Books

Plenty has been published about the Pacific to spur on the dream factor. First, check out the travel selection at www.lonelyplanet.com to narrow down your destination(s).

Following is a list of titles recommended by the authors of this book. Any or all will make great beach companions. For more titles, see the Literature and Books sections in the individual country chapters.

Nuanua – Pacific Writing in English since 1980 Anthology of Pacific prose and poetry that's great for a taste of the small but vibrant contemporary local literary scene.

Robert Louis Stevenson – His Best Pacific Writings (Roger Robinson) Essential reading for travellers to Samoa, French Polynesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and anyone into early masterpieces of Pacific writing.

Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook has Gone Before (Tony Horwitz; also sold as *Into the Blue: Blue Latitudes: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook has Gone Before*) Frustrating, funny and insightful look at the voyages of Captain Cook and a beer-swilling mate by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

The Miss Tutti Frutti Contest (Graeme Lay) A must for anyone flitting around the region. This collection of South Pacific travel stories is rich in weird and wonderful characters, subtle wit and anecdotal insights. The text is light but fast.

Transit of Venus – Travels in the Pacific (Julian Evans) Recounts a shoestring journey by boat through the Pacific and is one of the region's best modern yarns.

The Happy Isles of Oceania – Paddling the Pacific (Paul Theroux) The book travellers love to hate. Poor old perpetually miserable Paul is anything but happy as he complains about having a watched time kayaking around parts of the Pacific. Ten marks for some great insights.

The Fatal Impact – The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840 (Alan Moorehead) One of the most influential books written on the impact of colonialism in the South Pacific. Critically assesses the havoc wreaked by early European explorers.

Tales of the South Pacific, Rascals in Paradise and Return to Paradise (James Michener) Famous collection of short stories dealing with life in the South Pacific from WWII onward.

Slow Boats Home (Gavin Young) Sequel to Young's earlier book *Slow Boats to China*. Both describe the author's 1979 voyage around the world on boats big and small. The sequel includes the Pacific part of the journey.

James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, published in 1958, sparked a revival of Western interest in the Pacific, won a Pulitzer Prize, and was made into a musical (see the boxed text, opposite).

Websites

The Internet is a rich resource for travellers. Research your trip, hunt down bargain air fares, book hotels, check weather conditions or chat with locals and other travellers about the best places to visit (or avoid!). For country-specific websites, see the Directory in the individual country chapters.

Airline Information (www.travelocity.com) What airlines fly where, when and for how much.

Jane's Oceania (www.janesoceania.com) Publishes articles about nearly every Pacific country.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Here you'll find succinct summaries on travelling to most places on earth, postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Pacific Beat (www.abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat) Radio Australia's site has up-to-the-minute news and current events stories from around the Pacific.

Pacific Magazine (www.pacificislands.cc) Up-to-date news and reviews in this region-wide magazine.

University of the South Pacific (www.uspbookcentre.com) Lists Pacific books and publications.

MUST-SEE MOVIES

Settle into a comfy sofa, put your feet up and let these films whet your Pacific appetite.

Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf (The Land Has Eyes) Came out in 2004 and tells the tale of an island girl's struggle with poverty and prejudice and the strength she discovers in her island's mythology.

The Bounty Most recent movie made about the famous *Bounty* mutiny (see p424). Stars Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson, and is well worth a watch.

The Thin Red Line War film showcasing the beautiful singing of the Solomon Islanders (see p548), and the stunning scenery of Guadalcanal.

Tatau Samoa German director Gisa Schleelein retraces the life of Samoan tattoo master Paulo Sul'uape.

Wayfinders – A Pacific Odyssey Documentary about traditional voyaging and the *Hokule'a* canoe. For more, check out www.pbs.org/wayfinders.

Rapa Nui B-grade matinee coproduced by Kevin Costner in 1994. It's hardly essential viewing, but it does give the feel of Easter Island's remote appeal.

Return to Paradise and South Pacific Both these 1950s movies were based on novels by James Michener. The former was filmed in Samoa, where Return to Paradise Beach became a popular tourist destination. They show little of Pacific culture, and these days may be of more comedy value than social.

Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf (The Land Has Eyes) is the first Fijian film to be submitted for nomination for a foreign-language Oscar.

FAVOURITE FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Local festivals that involve a few different countries are listed here, along with some individual high-lights. For other country-specific events, see Festivals & Events in the individual country directories.

Rise of Palolo (p514) It's not everywhere you get to celebrate worms rising at midnight. This one's a must.

Miss Galaxy Pageant (p727) Beauty contest Tongan-style, and always booked out.

Naghol (p802) South Pentecost's famous land-divers take the leap in April and May.

Festival of Pacific Arts Vibrant festival showcasing traditional art works from around the Pacific. Held every four years in October in a different country. The next one is in American Samoa in 2008.

Foire de Bourail (p350) Cowboys come to town for this annual rodeo-style shindig at Bourail on New Caledonia's main island.

Hawaiki Nui Va'a Canoes from many Pacific countries are raced between the islands of Huahine, Ra'iatea, Tahaa and Bora Bora in French Polynesia every November.

South Pacific Games In August–September 2007, Samoa will take another turn at hosting these games, which are held every four years at a different location around the Pacific.

Fiesta (p238) Patron saints are honoured with chilli peppers and more in Guam's village festivals.

Pacific Island Sevens Tournaments Held annually in the Cook Islands, Fiji and Samoa, this event features as much dance and celebration as it does rugby.

CONDUCT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Few Pacific places are uptight about clothing standards, but dressing like a slob won't endear you to anyone. It's rarely appropriate for men to go bare-chested in town, and women's dress conventions are even stricter. Dress casually, but ensure you are sufficiently covered up (cover your shoulders and wear trousers or a knee-length dress) if your sightseeing includes places of worship.

Topless bathing is accepted in a few countries, particularly those with ties to France (such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia), but even here it's usually restricted to resorts and certain beaches. Nude bathing is almost never on.

Public displays of affection between men and women, even two tourists, are often inappropriate. Flirting with the locals can also get you into a *lot* of trouble; there are some very serious expectations attached to what may appear to be casual affairs. Despite the writings of Western visitors from Bougainville to Margaret Mead, the Pacific is *not* a playground of free love.

Avoid becoming visibly frustrated when things don't go your way. Causing someone to lose face because they have failed you is an unforgivable sin.

Both tipping for service and bargaining for better prices can cause offence – for more, see p831.

While most islanders will enjoy being photographed, some people may be superstitious about your camera or suspicious of your motives. Ask permission if a candid shot can't be made and don't insist or snap a picture anyway if permission is denied.

Lastly, when visiting traditional villages there are a few guidelines to keep in mind. For details, see p53.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

As a visitor, you have a responsibility to the local people and the environment. Respect local traditions and you'll more readily be accepted, especially in rural areas. When it comes to the environment, the key rule is to preserve natural resources.

If you want to avoid eating fish that are becoming endangered, abstain from swordfish, marlin, southern bluefin tuna (albacore tuna is fine) and gemfish. Turtle can be added to the list, too. The same goes for buying artworks – bypass those that incorporate turtle shells as well as rare shells, corals or timbers.

If you just gotta go when you're somewhere in the wilderness, bury waste in holes at least 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse to avoid contaminating water sources. Likewise, don't use detergents or toothpaste (even if they are biodegradable) in or near watercourses.

Litter is a huge problem on many Pacific islands. Piles of plastic trash, aluminium cans and worse spoil beaches and lagoons. Even if the local attitude towards rubbish is blasé, don't add to the problem by leaving your garbage behind. For more on environmental issues, see p65.

For more detailed information on responsible travel, see the boxed texts about diving (p69), yachting (p842), and conduct in the South Pacific (above).

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

PACIFIC PARADISE

Top of the pops is regional hub Fiji. Take a boat to the **Mamanucas** (p178) or **Yasawas** (p184), two island groups just made for tropical acclimatisation. Bus it to villages in the **Nausori Highlands** (p178), then continue to **Suva** (p166), where you can discover the best way to eat human at the **Fiji Museum** (p166; also see p176).

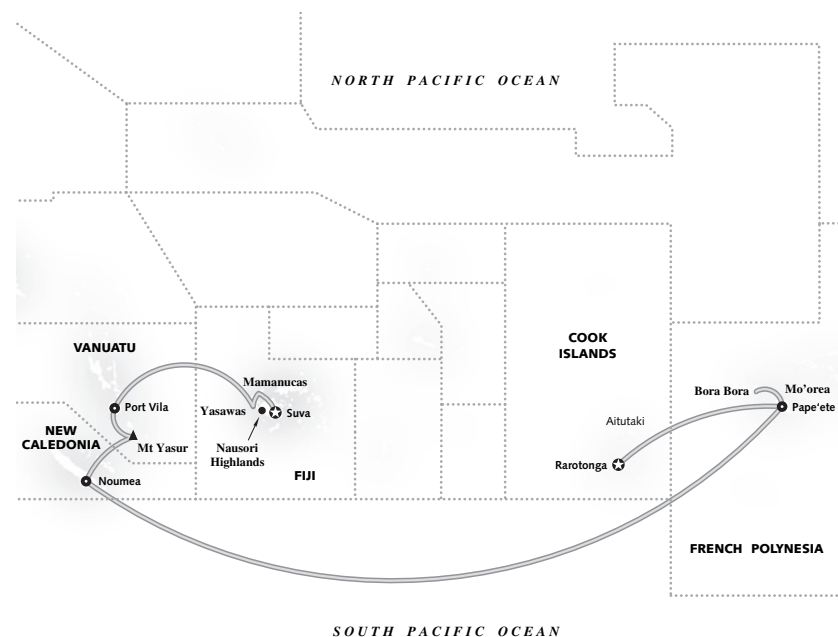
Time to flee? A **kava** (p774) session in one of Vanuatu's *nakamal* will calm any residual frayed nerves. Reignite them with an evening visit to **Mt Yasur** (p781), one of the world's most accessible volcanoes.

Onward to New Caledonia, where the sublime **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315) showcases Pacific cultures. You'll need to crank up your *francs* for **Noumea** (p310), and keep cranking as you cross to **Pape'ete** (p595). Drop anchor in the vibrant French Polynesian capital for a night, then high-speed it to idyllic **Mo'orea** (p604) or go into serious debt on **Bora Bora** (p631).

Your last port-o-call is the Cook Islands. Both **Aitutaki** (p454) and Rarotonga do **island nights** (p452) where you can fling your hips in final farewell to the Pacific.

One to Two Months/Fiji to the Cook Islands

Clock up 12,000km as you crisscross the Pacific in this classic island hop. Begin your epic Melanesian style in Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, then explore Polynesia in Tahiti and French Polynesia, and Rarotonga and the Cook Islands.



MICRONESIAN MADNESS

Two to Four Weeks/Guam to Pohnpei (Federated States of Micronesia)

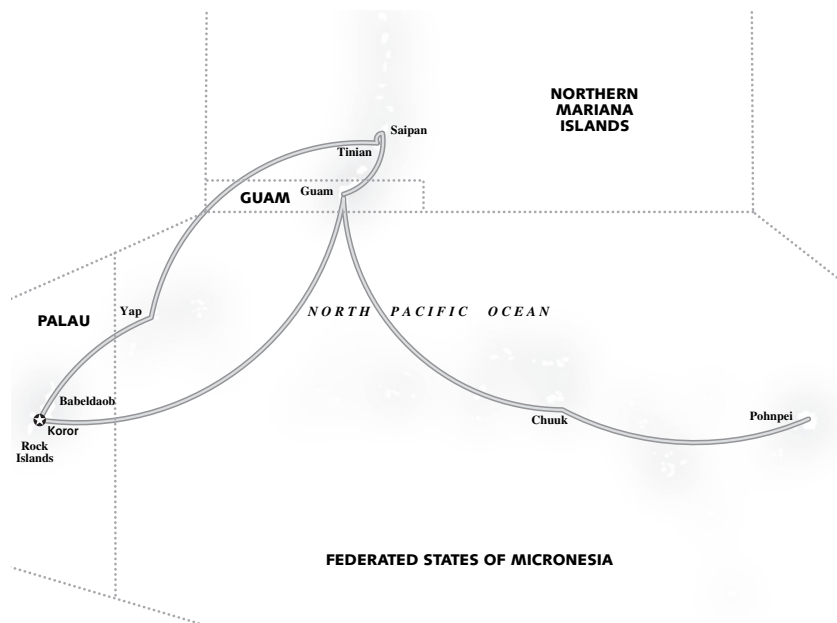
Go straight to **Guam** (p217), the obligatory starting point for some air passes (p214), and spend the evening at **Chamorro Village Night Market** (p235). Next day, fly a kite with the locals at the **War in the Pacific National Historical Park** (p227), one of Guam's WWII memorial parks, and take in **Talofofo Falls** (p231), before moving out to the **Northern Mariana Islands** (p368). On the main island, Saipan, head to the sobering **Banzai Cliff** (p378), where Japanese families committed suicide en masse in WWII. Fly just 10 minutes to **Tinian** (p382) and feel the goose bumps rise as you land on the island where atomic warfare started (see the boxed text, p384).

Next stop, **Yap** (p126) in the **Federated States of Micronesia** (FSM; p98). Traditional culture is strong here – check out the bank of **stone money** (p130) on the walk to **Balabat** village (p129), and mind you dodge the **betel nut** (p132).

Allocate plenty of time for **Palau** (p393) – it's a Micronesian must. The **Rock Islands** (p404) top the itinerary, whether you're here to dive, snorkel or kayak. **Babeldaob** boasts the country's oldest *bai* (p408) and great food is the go in **Koror** (p403).

Finish your trip with **Chuuk** and **Pohnpei**. Both are back in FSM; reconnect via Guam. In the diving world, **Chuuk** (p119) is synonymous with shipwrecks – a whole Japanese WWII fleet litters the island's lagoon. **Pohnpei** (p109) has another type of submarine world – the ancient sunken city of **Nan Madol** (p114). The locals will be able to conjure up a canoe to explore this fascinating watery kingdom.

Micronesia's most accessible countries are in the palm of your hand with an air pass that starts in Guam and takes you 6500km via Saipan, Yap, Palau and Chuuk, to end in Pohnpei in FSM.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

IDLING THE OUTLIERS

Two to Six Months/Pitcairn Island to Tokelau

Off the trodden track in the Pacific? That's easy – getting back on is usually the tough bit.

Start at one of the most isolated places on earth – **Pitcairn Island** (p419). Best known these days for the sex trial that rocked the island in recent years, it's also world famous as the hideaway for the *Bounty* mutineers. Fletcher Christian's bible still exists.

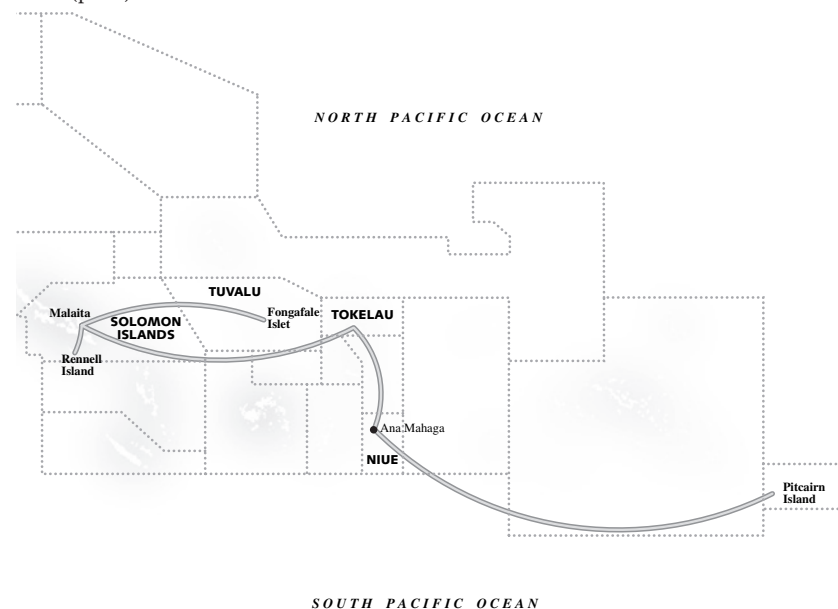
Next up is **Niue** (p356), proud holder of the 'world's smallest self-governing country' title. Don't expect blonde beaches on this Polynesian stalwart – instead, dramatic cliffs tower above the ocean, while, below sea level, caves such as the **Ana Mahaga** (p362) entice international divers.

Tokelau (p679) beckons those who yearn to go where few intrepid travellers have been. Just getting to this country is a large part of the fun: there are no planes, only a boat once a fortnight or so. Tokelau is also a case of catch it while you can – it may not have too many decades to celebrate if global warming continues (see p681).

Dip into Melanesian culture in the **Solomons** (p542). Head to the wild reaches of **Malaita** (p569) with its artificial islands or take off to **Rennell Island** (p567), a World Heritage site that few travellers explore.

If time is really no object, top the journey off at **Tuvalu** (p732). Don't hope to have this speck in the Pacific to yourself – about 4500 Tuvaluans are sardined onto tiny **Fongafale Islet** (p738), the country's main island. Overcrowding may explain the women's dance style during **fatele** (p737).

Pack more than a cut lunch for this 11,600km adventure to some of the most isolated countries in the world. You'll need extended leave from the office.

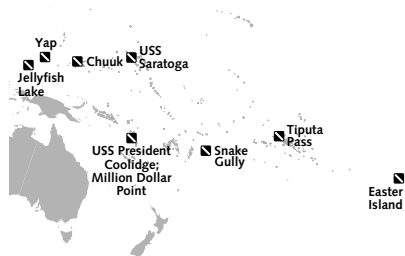


TAILORED TRIPS

SURREAL SCUBA

A diver's delight – there's no other way to describe the South Pacific. The crystalline waters are teeming with marine life, and unbelievable sites are unexploited and uncrowded. A beginner? You're in for a treat (see the boxed text, p77). Experienced divers already know the lures – a profusion of pelagics, shipwrecks galore and wild encounters including **feeding frenzies** (see p70 and the boxed text on p72).

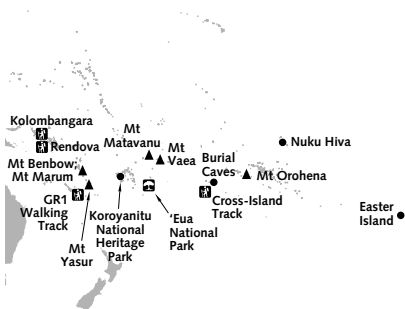
Drift with grey sharks at **Tiputa Pass** (p71) in French Polynesia. Inspect one of the world's best wrecks, the **USS President Coolidge** (p74), off Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu. Here, too, is **Million Dollar Point** (p75), a WWII military junkyard. Niue offers water with stunning visibility – just what you want for the aptly named **Snake Gully** (p73). Medusa would feel right at home here. The only place with better visibility is **Easter Island** (p70). FSM offers a lagoon load of shipwrecks off **Chuuk** (p75), and manta rays are the mantra off **Yap** (p76). The Marshall Islands boast the world's only diveable aircraft carrier, the **USS Saratoga** (p282). And where else but in Palau's **Jellyfish Lake** (p77) can you suspend yourself with thousands of jellyfish – surreal! And if that's not enough, there's always a **muck dive** (p74).



LAND AHOY

The Pacific by foot – it sounds like an oxymoron, but it's not. Slip off those fins, slide into sandshoes and remember: V stands for volcano – the live variety on Vanuatu. While frighteningly spectacular **Mt Yasur** (p781) won't stretch you, hiking up **Mt Benbow** or **Mt Marum** (p790) will. Too much heat? Then go for sleeping beauties such as **Rendova** (p564) or **Kolombangara** (p562) in the Solomon Islands, or Samoa's **Mt Matavanu** (p506). Still in Samoa but surely never to awaken is Robert Louis Stevenson – his tomb sits atop **Mt Vaea** (p492).

Conservation areas naturally offer hikers wide scope. Cool off under the rainforest canopy in Tonga's beautiful **'Eua National Park** (p706) or extend yourself with a climb up Castle Rock in Fiji's **Koroyanitu National Heritage Park** (p177).



New Caledonia's biggest island, Grande Terre, boasts plenty of options, including the **GR1 walking track** (p323). On the other side of the Pacific, French Polynesia's most famous island, Tahiti, has **Mt Orohena** (p597), or you can explore a wilder side of paradise on **Nuku Hiva** (p652).

In the Cook Islands, discover the take on Rarotonga via the **Cross-Island Track** (p444). If razor-sharp walking is more your thing, 'Atiu's coral *makatea* hide ancient **burial caves** (p461).

Hike between archaeological sites on **Easter Island** (p95), and don't give diminutive size a second thought – this speck in the ocean is fab for walking, and you'll never get lost.

Snapshot

For a supposedly quiet corner of the world, the Pacific has a knack for making headlines. It's frequently mentioned in the same breath as global warming, but – unlike nations who debate the effectiveness of the Kyoto Protocol (see p66) in stopping the rising ocean levels – the Pacific directly sees the consequences. In late 1999, two Kiribati islands disappeared; fearing a similar impact on its low-lying coral atolls, Tuvalu has asked Australia and New Zealand to resettle its people, a move that would make the Tuvaluans the world's first environmental refugees. Still suspicious it's all tree-hugging propaganda? According to the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project, Tonga experienced a water-level rise of 10cm in the last 13 years, and in early 2006 Tuvalu encountered the highest tides in 15 years.

When the Fisheries Commission met in Pohnpei during 2004 to discuss the region's fishing future, another environmental concern was at issue: overfishing. Islanders license the waters around their land – usually to larger international companies – and overfishing versus profit, particularly for smaller island nations, remains an unbalanced debate. In some nations this revenue accounts for a big chunk of national income: 22% in the Federated States of Micronesia and 34% in Kiribati. A similar issue came to a head in 2005 when Japan sought to resume commercial whaling with the International Whaling Commission, and Pacific nations such as the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu supported the proposal. Although it was narrowly defeated, Australia and New Zealand were both critical of this stance, while Japan may make further attempts to resume commercial whaling with Pacific support.

Australia exerts considerable influence in the Pacific through its membership of the Pacific Islands Forum. Recently Australia has been driving changes in the Forum to create more regionalism, whereby Pacific nations will act collectively on trade, HIV/AIDS treatment, waste management and air transport. Under the Forum's Pacific Plan the nations of the region would remove barriers to trade within the region and trade externally as a collective group. This could one day create a single currency in the Pacific and will certainly create favourable economies of scale.

The benefits of regionalism can be most easily seen in air transport, with every Pacific nation feeling the financial burden of maintaining its own airline (Nauru had its last plane repossessed by creditors in late 2005). Similarly, defence and protection of fishing rights is a costly exercise for individual nations but could be done more efficiently as a collective.

The great sticking point with a regional approach is that some governments fear that they'll be sidelined by bigger nations. Talk of making Suva or even Auckland the regional centre will bring hundreds of jobs to Fiji or New Zealand but may create unemployment on Tuvalu or Kiribati.

The need for a collective approach to HIV/AIDS became crucial in 2005, however, when the UN declared that the region was 'on the brink of a serious HIV epidemic' unless prevention and causes of infection were considered. On other issues such as human rights and common sporting facilities the Forum hasn't reached any agreement.

The need for regional sporting facilities was heightened when the 2006 Micronesian Games was threatened with cancellation after Yap and the

FAST FACTS

Most common unit of currency: US dollar (US\$)

Total visitors: 2,249,913 (1,287,568 on holiday)

Estimated total cars: 276,000

Estimated revenue for Palau from TV show *Survivor*: US\$4 million

Highest price paid for a single blue-fin tuna: US\$42,000

Highest infant mortality rate: 66 per 1000 births (Solomon Islands)

While the Pacific supplies over a third of the world's tuna catch, worth almost US\$2 billion, only 10% of it is caught by Pacific islanders, who are happier to license their fishing out.

Marshall Islands backed out of hosting the event. The games bring in 1500 athletes from across the area, which could be too great a burden for smaller economies. The favourite to host the event at the time of research was the Northern Mariana Islands, which had sunk money into creating ovals and other infrastructure.

As with any part of the world, there are infrequent conflicts in the Pacific, such as the Fijian coups (see p139) and the French Polynesia troubles (p584). Rebellion in the Solomons saw Australian military intervention in 2003 to restore order, and tension in Fiji in late 2005 led to fears of another coup. See p29 for information on travel alerts in the region.

The Authors



GEERT COLE & LEANNE LOGAN

Coordinating Authors
Destination, Highlights, Getting Started, Itineraries, Pitcairn Island, Tokelau, US Territories, Directory, Transport

Geert and Leanne were the coordinating authors for this book.

When Geert visited the Pacific for the first time many moons ago, he could not have been further away from his homeland, Belgium. Frangipani, flashing smiles and timelessness – the natural beauty, cultures and simplicity of everyday life in the South Pacific entranced him as he sailed from New Zealand (NZ) to Samoa. Now with his partner, Leanne, and two young daughters, Geert returns as often as possible to shed his Western skin. As a family, they can attest that the Pacific's perfect for kids.

Leanne, an Australian-based writer and photographer, first fell under the South Pacific's spell more than a decade ago when she worked on Lonely Planet's *New Caledonia* guide. She's been lured back many times since, and on each visit vows to hang on forever to the best de-stress device yet invented: island time. Inevitably, it takes only a few days back at home for her pledge to fall to pieces and life to gallop off like a Melbourne Cup starter. Oh well, looks like another trip to paradise is needed.



Our Favourite Trip

We have spent more time under coconut palms than is fair in anyone's lifetime, but our best trip ever was road-testing the Pacific as a family.

We toted the tots up the steamy Mt Yasur volcano in Vanuatu (p781); they didn't need nudging up Amédée lighthouse in New Caledonia (p316). We swam and snorkelled ourselves silly in the Solomon Islands (p542), and could have spent a fortnight in either Fiji (p150) or Vanuatu (p771) – there's so much there for kids. The highlight of Samoa was testing Papase'e Sliding Rock (p495), but the Alofaaga Blowholes (p508) came a close second. As for food, we're certain nothing beats those *pains au chocolat* from Pape'ete's marché (p595).

Conclusion? Pacific plus family gets a big tick. Next time, maybe it'll be something different...like tying the knot (see the boxed text, p824).



LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the Internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



BRETT ATKINSON

Niue

Auckland, the world's biggest Polynesian city, has been Brett's home for more than 30 years. While travelling and writing in over 40 countries he has squeezed in trips all around the Pacific with his wife, Carol. They've been lost in a tin mine in New Caledonia, negotiated slippery, sliding rocks in Samoa, and looked for shellfish with Tongan pigs. Brett will also state on oath that the world's best-tasting parrotfish comes from Maré in the Loyalty Islands. Every March you'll find him celebrating with 300,000 other Aucklanders at the annual Pasifika Festival.



OLIVER BERRY

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands

Oliver's first trip to the Cook Islands was as a stopover on a long haul to NZ, a visit that ended up lasting eight weeks. He's since travelled widely across the South Pacific and picked up a few useful skills along the way, including how to catch sand crabs with your bare hands, some top tips for beating a tribal chief at poker, and an excellent Samoan recipe for mosquito repellent. He's been trying to find an excuse to return to the Cook Islands ever since that first unforgettable trip; writing a guidebook is the best one yet. Oliver lives in Cornwall and works as a writer and photographer. His awards include the Guardian Young Travel Writer of the year.



BECCA BLOND

Tahiti & French Polynesia

Whether it's on Lonely Planet time, for the *South Africa*, *Lesotho & Swaziland* and *Thailand* guides, or personal time, on trips to Zanzibar, Mauritius and the south coast of France, Becca has devoted way too much time searching for the world's best beach destination. Her search ended after discovering French Polynesia (the sand's only so-so, she says, but the water is perfect and the people are fantastic). When she's not roaming the world for Lonely Planet, Becca lives in Boulder, Colorado. In her infrequent spare moments she likes to play in the mountains or just chill out at home with her boyfriend and fellow Lonely Planet author, Aaron, and their big, goofy dog, Duke.



CELESTE BRASH

Food & Drink, Wallis & Futuna

After two magical trips to French Polynesia, Celeste made a permanent move to a tiny atoll in the Tuamotu islands in 1995. Over five years, she cleaned pearl oysters till her fingers were raw, and learnt to love sharks, bake bread and cook fish in more ways than she thought humanly possible. Cravings for indoor plumbing and fresh fruit prompted a move to Tahiti, where she has lived ever since. She now writes, raises her children, dabbles in the pearl business and still cooks lots of fish. During and around her time in Tahiti she has managed to travel extensively throughout the Pacific, including visits to Fiji, New Caledonia, Easter Island, and Wallis and Futuna.



JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET

South Pacific Diving, Easter Island

A Paris-based journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard is a die-hard South Pacific lover and a diving fiend. He first landed on Tahiti in 1995 to work as a diving instructor, and it was the start of a love affair with Polynesia as a whole. Momentarily based in Tahiti, he was all too happy to travel the breadth and length of Easter Island for this edition, climbing Rano Kau, jumping in the fabulously clear waters off Motu Nui and exploring the archaeological sites in the company of archaeologists. He journeyed on to the Cook Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu to check out the best dive sites for the South Pacific Diving chapter of this book. A diver's life is a hard one, isn't it?



TIONE CHINULA

New Caledonia

Tione first experienced the laid-back Pacific lifestyle in the mid-1990s, when she spent a year in Tahiti. She made New Caledonia her home eight years ago when she moved there from NZ. In keeping with the relaxed lifestyle she spends many long, lazy days at the beach, from where she occasionally rouses herself to pursue more energetic activities such as diving in the magnificent lagoon, mountain biking through the vast landscapes of the Far South, and tramping along rugged coastlines or in the central mountain ranges with her husband, Vincent.



SUSANNAH FARFOR

Tonga

Susannah is an Australian-based writer and editor whose work regularly appears in food and adventure-related travel publications. She has explored many of the South Pacific's gems since donning her first grass skirt in Tahiti at the age of seven. Susannah researched and wrote on Tonga for Lonely Planet's *Samoan Islands & Tonga* guidebook, and has also researched and written for Lonely Planet's *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands* and Australia series guides. For this title she got a taste for Tonga while sailing, snorkelling, kayaking, delving into caves and sinking her toes into the sand on long stretches of uninhabited beach.



JOCELYN HAREWOOD

Vanuatu

Jocelyn brought her children to Vanuatu in the 1970s, when Port Vila was one dusty street with a few equally dusty shops. On this visit, her granddaughters travelled for part of the journey, proving again that it's one great place for kids. So much changes with each visit, yet Le Meridien, where she first windsurfed, and L'Houstalet, where she first ate flying fox – yikes – are still there and better than ever. The adventures are more dramatic each time she visits. Three years ago she honed her skills at yachting, fishing and drinking kava. This time she was more into scuba diving, abseiling and checking that the local beer was as good as ever.



VIRGINIA JEALOUS

Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu

Virginia was based in Suva, Fiji, from 2004 to 2006. Working with an NGO gave her the opportunity to spend time in several countries with local colleagues, and also ensured that she drank far too much kava while developing a lasting relationship with dalo. For several years Virginia lived on the other Christmas Island in Australia's Indian Ocean Territories; she was particularly pleased to visit the Micronesian Christmas Island during research for this guide. She's also lived in northern Australia, East Timor, Fiji, Indonesian West Papua and the Philippines, and has authored bits of Lonely Planet's *Philippines*, *East Timor*, *Australia*, *Vietnam*, *Indonesia* and *Fiji* guidebooks.



ROWAN MCKINNON

Solomon Islands

Rowan, a freelance writer and musician, has been travelling to the South Pacific for nearly 20 years. As a child he lived on Nauru, and he has an abiding love and respect for Pacific people, art and culture. He's contributed to several editions of Lonely Planet's *Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands* guidebook as well as writing up the Solomon Islands for the 1st edition of the *South Pacific* book. Research for this book took Rowan to the Solomons again. He lives in Melbourne.



SIMON SELLARS

Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau

Simon is a freelance writer and editor. His folio includes published pieces on Japanese telepaths, low-budget filmmaking, S&M mistresses, new media and technology, psychic warfare, the space shuttle, and the requisite travel articles. Simon is the founder of Liquid Architecture, an Australian festival of sound art; Sleepy Brain, an online cultural magazine; *Subterrain*, an anthology of writings by homeless people; and Ballardian, a website recording the career and influence of writer JG Ballard. He's been fascinated by the Micronesian islands ever since he first laid eyes on a globe of the world.



PAUL SMITZ

Samoa, American Samoa

Paul appears to have a thing about the Pacific. In addition to the Lonely Planet research he conducted on the Samoas for this book and for Lonely Planet's *Samoan Islands & Tonga* guidebook, he has also researched guidebooks on NZ and Australia, and he just can't seem to get enough of beach culture, tropical climates and general indolence. He thought the Samoas were a special place and thoroughly enjoyed touring the main islands and several tiny islets, leaving a trail of palusami crumbs, crumpled paperbacks and empty Vailima bottles in his wake.



VINCENT TALBOT

New Caledonia

Vincent was born in France but has spent half his life in the Pacific. Having lived in Tahiti as a teenager, he returned there after completing studies in marine biology and spent time enjoying the simple way of life on the secluded Tuamotu atolls and discovering various surfing spots around the Society Islands. From French Polynesia he headed to New Caledonia, where he spends his free time kayaking on the vast lagoon, and exploring the country's remote valleys, mountains and coastline with his wife, Tione, and his little daughter, Moorea.



JUSTINE VAISUTIS

Fiji

Justine has researched many a beach for Lonely Planet, having contributed to seven guides, including *Queensland* and other Australian titles. She has also co-authored Lonely Planet's *Fiji* guidebook. Considering herself a shoreline expert, she journeyed to this archipelago with the cocky gait of a seasoned beach bum – it proved to match her know-how and then some. Tireless diving and snorkelling expeditions, village visits, kava drinking, cultivating a 'Fiji Bitter' beer belly, highland treks, acquiring new 'family members'...and scrutinising some 40 beaches instilled in her a great love for all things Fijian. Justine lives in Melbourne.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

George Dunford wrote the Snapshot and the Culture chapters. Completing an honours degree in history at the Australian National University saw George studying several units in Pacific history and later working with the Pacific Manuscript Bureau. He has also written historical material on Captain Cook's journals for the National Library of Australia's award-winning Endeavour CD-ROM. He has contributed to several books for Lonely Planet, including New Zealand and Southeast Asia on a shoestring, and has worked as a freelance writer.

Tony Horwitz wrote the boxed text on Captain James Cook (p44). Tony is a Pulitzer-winning reporter and nonfiction author. In researching *Blue Latitudes* (also published as *Into the Blue*), Tony travelled widely in the Pacific islands – 'boldly going where Captain Cook has gone before' – to Tahiti, Bora Bora, NZ, Australia, Niue, Tonga and Hawai'i.

Errol Hunt wrote the History and Environment chapters, and the boxed texts Maui's Fish (p54), The Ancient Homeland, Havaiki (p503), Tokelau Telephones (p684) and St Pierre Chanel of Oceania (p812). Errol was coordinating author of Lonely Planet's 1st edition of *South Pacific*, sole author of the 6th edition of *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands*, and has written extensively on NZ, Tuvalu, Tahiti and Samoa. He has spent most of his time at Lonely Planet, however, as the commissioning editor for guidebooks to Australia, NZ and the Pacific islands.

Clement Paligaru wrote the boxed text Indo-Fijian History & Culture (p140). Clement is an Indo-Fijian who came to Australia in 1984. An Asia-Pacific specialist, he has worked as a radio journalist and producer for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for over 10 years. He currently produces Radio Australia's daily In the Loop programme, which profiles the cultures and societies of Oceania.

Martin Robinson wrote the boxed text Fa'alavelave (p480). Martin lived on Samoa for a year getting to know the islands from the grassroots by staying with hospitable families in small villages on all the main islands. From his experiences and other research he has written numerous articles on Samoan culture and history for Pacific island magazines. He currently lives in Auckland on another Polynesian island that he has written about for Lonely Planet.

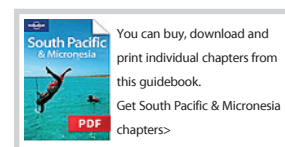
Saufatu Sopoanga wrote the boxed text Climate Change & Global Warming (p66). Mr Sopoanga is the Deputy Prime Minister of Tuvalu, with the dual portfolios of Minister of Works and Energy and Minister of Communications and Transport. In 1990 he was appointed Tuvalu's High Commissioner to Fiji and in 1996 he was appointed Secretary to Government, the highest-ranking post in Tuvalu's public service, a position he held until he retired in 2000 and was elected to parliament from his home island of Nukufetau. He was Tuvalu's ninth prime minister from 2002 to 2004.

Dr Michael Sorokin wrote the Health chapter. Dr Sorokin has extensive experience as a physician and GP in South Africa, the UK, the Pacific islands and rural South Australia. He has special interests in rheumatology, infectious diseases and preventative medicine. Dr Sorokin was recently awarded the Order of Fiji in recognition of his services to health care in Fiji. He is partly responsible for the maintenance of the Traveller's Medical & Vaccination Centre (TMVC) database and helps with reference material for the continuing education of TMVC medical staff.

Miranda Tetlow wrote the boxed text Whaling Politics (p699). Miranda is a columnist, freelance writer and broadcaster, currently working in Australia for the Canberra Times and radio station Triple J. In 2003 she was lucky enough to spend 12 months in Nuku'alofa. Most of this time was spent working as a media adviser for a Tongan NGO and learning the much maligned art of cooking sipi (mutton flaps). Despite a series of unfortunate events that involved dengue fever, tinned corned beef and an amorous taxi driver, Miranda has been passionate about Tonga and its people ever since.

Tony Wheeler was born in England, but grew up in Pakistan, the Bahamas and the USA. In recent years he's travelled extensively in the Pacific, an activity that has led to two 'castaway' episodes, one on Nukufetau in the Tuvalu group (described in the boxed text *Marooned in Tuvalu*, p745) and one on Futuna in Wallis & Futuna. Read all the detail in *Lonely Planet Unpacked Again: More Travel Disaster Stories*. Tony also wrote the boxed text *Lost on Niue* (p361).

Also thanks to Rowland Burley (boxed text Tokelau, At Last, p685), Ian Byles (Lawyer of the Dance, p760), Zayne D'Crus (The Play's the Thing, p771), Trudy Hairs (Sup Sup & Shopping, p547) and Anna Stone (Acting for Change, p142).



© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

History

It was about 50,000 years ago that people first reached the Pacific islands, arriving in New Guinea from Southeast Asia via Indonesia. These people, now known as Papuans, share ancestry with Australia's first Aborigines. Moving slowly east, the Papuans were halted in the northern Solomon Islands about 25,000 years ago, due to the lack of technology and skills necessary to cross the increasingly wide stretches of open ocean. Subsequent people, collectively known as Austronesians, moved into the area from the west, mingling with the Papuans and eventually becoming the highly diverse group of people we conveniently group together as 'Melanesians'. New Guinea and the Solomons were the only inhabited islands in the Pacific for many thousands of years.

The wider seas from the Solomons to Vanuatu were finally crossed in about 1500 BC. An Austronesian people now known as the Lapita (see the boxed text, below) finally developed the technology and the skills to cross the open seas to New Caledonia. Heading east they quickly expanded through Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, where they developed the culture we now know as Polynesian.

The Melanesians of New Guinea and the Solomons mingled a little with the Lapita and followed them across the Pacific. Melanesians came to dominate New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji.

The Lapitas' Polynesian descendants 'paused' on Samoa and Tonga for a thousand years or so, until more advanced ocean vessels and skills were developed. At some time around 200 BC they crossed the longer ocean stretches to the east to the Society and Marquesas island groups (in modern French Polynesia). From there, voyaging canoes travelled southwest to Rarotonga and the southern Cook Islands, southeast to Rapa Nui (Easter

LAPITA

The ancient race of people known as the Lapita are thought to be responsible for the wide distribution of Polynesian culture and Austronesian languages in the Pacific. Coming from the Bismarck Archipelago in far-north Papua New Guinea (PNG) in around 1500 BC, they were the first to populate the islands from Vanuatu east to New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. It was in Tonga and Samoa that the Lapita developed into the people we now call Polynesians.

The Lapita had an enormous influence over a vast area of the Pacific from 1500 BC to 500 BC, where their influence can be traced through the far-flung dispersal of their unique pottery. Lapita pottery has been found in PNG, New Caledonia, in parts of Micronesia and in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Futuna.

The Lapita were highly skilled sailors and navigators, able to cross hundreds of kilometres of open sea, and trade and settlement were important to their culture. They were also agriculturists and practised husbandry of dogs, pigs and fowls. Regarded as the first cultural complex in the Pacific, they were a highly organised people who traded obsidian (volcanic glass used in tool production) from New Britain (PNG) with people up to 2500km away in Tonga and Samoa.

Today you can see Lapita artefacts in the national museums of Vanuatu (p767) and Fiji (p166), and at Sigatoka (p162), also in Fiji.

TIMELINE 50,000–25,000 years ago

People first settle the Pacific in PNG and the Solomon Islands

1500 BC

Long-distance seafaring begins in earnest in Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and central Polynesia

We, the Navigators and The Voyaging Stars – Secrets of the Pacific Island Navigators, both by meticulous researcher David Lewis, are excellent studies of traditional navigation methods, though they can be difficult books to find outside a library.

Island) in AD 300, north to Hawai'i around AD 400 and southwest past Rarotonga to Aotearoa (New Zealand) in AD 900.

The myriad islands and atolls of Micronesia, north of the Solomons and New Guinea, were populated by several groups of people over an extended period. Western Micronesia was reached by Asians island-hopping through the Philippines in about 1500 BC. Melanesians moved north into central Micronesia in 1000 BC, and eastern Micronesia was settled by Polynesians spreading northwards from their base in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga in the centuries up to AD 500.

Although the predominant direction of human movement was from west to east, population pressure and the occasional religious disagreement prompted constant movement of people across the oceans. Thus there are Polynesians in Melanesia's eastern islands; although largely Melanesian, Fiji is also home to many Polynesians and Micronesians.

The settlement of the Pacific Ocean was the most remarkable feat of ocean sailing up to that time. All but the furthest-flung islands of the massive Pacific were colonised by 200 BC. It's worth comparing that accomplishment with European navigation at the time, which was

restricted to coast-hugging journeys only. It was over 1000 years later that the Vikings crossed the (relatively small) Atlantic to make Europe's first cross-ocean settlement.

Melanesians embarked on regular trade routes and some war missions, but Polynesians travelled the broader stretches of open ocean (see the boxed text, opposite). Almost no Pacific islands were cut off entirely from other cultures, and the presence of the *kumara* (sweet potato) in the Pacific islands confirms that at least some journeys were made as far east as South America, probably from the Marquesas. Traditional stories also indicate exploratory journeys into Antarctic waters 'not seen by the sun'.

For further information about ancient Pacific cultures, see Arts (p55) and Religion (p54).

EUROPEAN EXPLORERS

Like Pacific islanders, European explorers came in search of resources (gold and spices initially), and were often driven by curiosity or national pride. However, Europeans were also inspired by one overpowering myth: the search for Terra Australis, the unknown great southern continent.

VOYAGING & NAVIGATION

Ancient Pacific islanders' voyages were motivated by war, trade, colonisation and the search for resources, or sometimes merely by curiosity and pride. The Tongans, known as the 'Vikings of the Pacific', ruled Samoa, Niue and eastern Fiji with an iron fist, and raided from Tuvalu to the Solomon Islands, 2700km to the west!

At the time of European contact, prodigious feats of navigation and voyaging still occurred, although not on as grand a scale as previously. The navigator-priest Tupaia, who boarded Cook's *Endeavour* in Tahiti, could name around 100 islands between the Marquesas and Fiji, and he directed Cook's search for islands west of Tahiti. For the entire circuitous journey to Java in Indonesia, Tupaia could always point in the direction of his homeland.

Canoes

The term 'canoe' (*vaka* or *va'a*) is misleading. The same word describes small dugouts used for river navigation, giant war vessels accommodating hundreds of men and 25m-long ocean-voyaging craft. Ocean-voyaging craft, either double canoes or single canoes with outriggers, carried one (or more) masts and sails of woven pandanus. James Cook and contemporary observers estimated that Pacific canoes were capable of speeds greater than their own ships; probably 150km to 250km per day, so that trips of 5000km could be comfortably achieved with available provisions.

Navigation Techniques

Initial exploratory journeys would often follow the migratory flights of birds. Once a new land had been discovered, the method of rediscovery was remembered and communicated mostly by way of which stars to follow. Fine-tuning of these directions was possible by observing the direction from which certain winds blew, the currents, wave fronts reflecting from islands and the flights of land birds.

European Theories

Many European explorers were unable to believe that a Stone-Age culture without a written language or use of the compass could have accomplished such amazing feats of navigation.

Some assumed that an earlier, more advanced culture must have existed. They proposed that islanders were the barbaric survivors of this ancient empire, living on the mountain tops of the sunken continent of Mu.

Once the continent of Mu was discounted, a wide range of possible origins for Pacific islanders was considered, including India, Israel and the Americas. Others proposed that the islands had been settled quite accidentally, as fishermen were blown off course and lost at sea.

The majority of evidence, however, points towards mostly deliberate west to east migration. This conclusion rests on linguistic, genetic, anthropological and archaeological studies, vegetation patterns, computer modelling of wind and currents, and a study of oral traditions.

Modern Voyaging

The voyaging skills of today's Pacific islanders may not match that of their ancestors, but the traditional knowledge of navigational methods is still being put to everyday use. Both small inter-island trips and long-distance voyages have been used to test many theories about ocean voyaging.

Probably the most famous such voyage, that of Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon Tiki* from South America to the Tuamotus in 1947, was made in an attempt to prove the (now thoroughly discredited) theory that Polynesia was populated from South America.

Modern voyages along traditional routes have refined theories about canoe construction and navigational methods. Among such journeys, the 25m-long outrigger canoe *Tarratai* was sailed from Kiribati 2500km south to Fiji in 1976. That same year the voyage of the 20m *Hokule'a*, which used traditional navigation methods for the 4250km trip from Hawai'i to Tahiti, sparked a resurgence of interest in traditional navigation.

Other voyaging canoes include the 21m *Hawaiki Nui*, which sailed 4000km from Tahiti to Aotearoa in 1985. In 1995 *Te Au o Tonga*, captained by the former prime minister of the Cook Islands, Sir Thomas Davis (Papa Tom), sailed from Rarotonga to Tahiti, on to Hawai'i and back to Rarotonga. Part of the cargo on the last leg was less than traditional: Papa Tom's new 1200cc Harley-Davidson. The *Hokule'a* and *Te Au o Tonga*, among other great *vaka*, continue to make long voyages.

200 BC

Another wave of settlement: Polynesians spread east to the Society and Marquesas Islands (modern-day French Polynesia)

AD 300–400

The final major wave leaves the Societies and Marquesas: north to Hawai'i, southwest to the Cooks and southeast to Easter Island

1521–1605

Magellan discovers Guam, Mendaña succumbs to malaria in the Solomons, de Quirós suffers mutiny in Vanuatu

1768–79

Captain James Cook 'boldly goes', then gets killed in Hawai'i

Scientific philosophies since the time of Ptolemy predicted the presence of a huge landmass in the southern hemisphere to counter the earth's northern continents. Otherwise, it was believed, the globe would be top-heavy and fall over! Belief in this southern continent was unqualified; explorers were not asked to confirm its existence, but to chart its coasts and parley with its people. In the absence of hard facts, Terra Australis was peopled with strange heathens and magical creatures, and rumoured to be rich in gold. The biblical tale of King Solomon required the presence of vast gold mines in some unknown location. What could be a better spot than Terra Australis?

Spanish

In 1521 the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan led a Spanish expedition that discovered, at the southern tip of the Americas, an entrance to the ocean he named Mar Pacifico – the Pacific Ocean – for the calmness of its seas. With extraordinary bad luck, and lacking the island-finding skills of Pacific islanders, Magellan saw only two small, uninhabited islands until he had sailed northwest across almost the entire ocean to Guam in Micronesia.

On Guam the first contact between Pacific islanders and Europeans followed a pattern that was to become all too familiar. The Micronesian (and Polynesian) attitude was that all property was shared. Guam's islanders helped themselves to one of the expedition's small boats and Magellan retaliated – seven islanders were killed. Magellan himself was killed two months later while in the Philippines, but not before he became the first person to circumnavigate the globe (having previously visited the Philippines from the other direction).

Spaniard Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra sailed west across the Pacific in search of Terra Australis in 1567. On the Solomon Islands, which he named after King Solomon's gold, conflict with the locals arose when islanders were unable to supply the resources Mendaña needed to resupply.

It took Mendaña nearly 30 years to gain approval for his disastrous second voyage during 1595. An estimated 200 islanders were killed in the Marquesas when conflict broke out; there was even more conflict with locals when they reached the Solomons, and fighting also spread to the crew. Mendaña himself died of malaria, and the expedition returned to Peru under the command of the more humane Pedro Fernández de Quirós.

Quirós led another expedition to the Pacific in 1605, discovering the Tuamotu Islands and Vanuatu.

Dutch

Jacques Le Maire and Wilhelm Schouten's 1616 search for Terra Australis introduced Europe to the Tongan islands and Futuna. Jacob Roggeveen spotted Bora Bora in the Society Islands in 1722, and Tutuila and Upolu in Samoa. Abel Tasman became the most famous Dutch explorer after charting Tasmania and the east coast of New Zealand in 1642, then sailing on to make contact with the islands of Tonga and Fiji.

English

In 1767 Samuel Wallis – *still* searching for Terra Australis – landed on Tahiti and claimed it for England, but the greatest of the English explorers was James Cook (see the boxed text, p44).

Following the most famous of maritime mutinies, Fletcher Christian captained the *Bounty* to discover Rarotonga in the southern Cook Islands in 1789 (see the boxed text, p424).

French

The most famous French explorer, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, came upon Tahiti and claimed it for France in 1768. He went on to the Samoan islands, which he named the Navigator Islands for the skills of the canoeists sailing circles around his ship. He continued on to Vanuatu and discovered Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Bougainville's impact was greater than dots on a map, however; his accounts of the South Pacific sparked massive interest in Europe and created the myth of a southern paradise.

In 1827 Dumont d'Urville sailed the Pacific searching for his lost countryman, the comte de la Pérouse, whose boat had sunk near the Solomon Islands in 1788. D'Urville's writings of this and another journey (10 years later) were to establish the concept of the three great subdivisions of the Pacific: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

MISSIONARIES

After a few largely unsuccessful Spanish Catholic forays into Micronesia during the 17th century, the first major attempt to bring Christianity to the Pacific was by English Protestants. Horrified – and inspired – by tales of cannibalism, human sacrifice, promiscuity and infanticide, the newly formed London Missionary Society (LMS) outfitted missionary outposts on Tahiti and Tonga, and in the Marquesas in 1797. These first holy crusades were no roaring success – within two years the Tongan and Marquesan missions were abandoned. The Tahitian mission did survive but its success was limited. For a decade only a handful of islanders were tempted to join the new religion.

Other Protestant groups soon joined the battle. The new players were the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS), fresh from moderate victory in New Zealand, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), following great success in Christianising Hawai'i. The WMS and ABCFM both failed miserably in the Marquesas, but fared marginally better in Tonga.

In the 1830s French Catholic missions were established in the Marquesas and on Tahiti. Catholic missionaries were often as pleased to convert a Protestant as a heathen, and the fierce rivalry between the different denominations extended to their islander converts. Religious conflicts fitted easily into the already complex political melee of Pacific society, and local chiefs gleefully manipulated the two Christian camps for their own purposes.

Despite the slow start, missionary success grew. By the 1820s missionary influence on Tahiti was enormous. The Bible was translated into Tahitian, a Protestant work ethic was being instilled, tattooing was discouraged,

'In 1827 Dumont d'Urville sailed the Pacific searching for his lost countryman, the comte de la Pérouse...'

1789

Fletcher Christian famously decides that enough is enough and relieves Captain Bligh of his duties

1841

Pierre Louis Marie Chanel becomes patron saint of the Pacific islands after knocking on one too many doors in Futuna

1860s–90s

'Blackbirders' devastate the populations of Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, New Caledonia, Easter Island, Vanuatu and the Solomons

1889–94

'Here he lies where he longs to be' – Robert Louis Stevenson abandons the chilly moors of Scotland for the warm delights of Samoa

'In the absence of hard facts, Terra Australis was peopled with strange heathens and magical creatures...'

CAPTAIN JAMES COOK *Tony Horwitz*

If aliens ever visit earth, they may wonder what to make of the countless obelisks, faded plaques and graffiti-covered statues of a stiff, wiggled figure gazing out to sea from Alaska to Australia, from New Zealand to North Yorkshire, from Siberia to the South Pacific. James Cook (1728–79) explored more of the earth's surface than anyone in history, and it's impossible to travel the Pacific without encountering the captain's image and his controversial legacy in the lands he opened to the West.

For a man who travelled so widely, and rose to such fame, Cook came from an extremely pinched and provincial background. The son of a day labourer in rural Yorkshire, he was born in a mud cottage, had little schooling and seemed destined for farm work – and for his family's grave plot in a village churchyard. Instead, Cook went to sea as a teenager, worked his way up from coal-ship servant to naval officer, and attracted notice for his exceptional charts of Canada. But Cook remained a little-known second lieutenant until, in 1768, the Royal Navy chose him to command a daring voyage to the South Seas.

In a converted coal ship called the *Endeavour*, Cook sailed to Tahiti, then became the first European to land at New Zealand and the east coast of Australia. Though the ship almost sank after striking the Great Barrier Reef, and 40% of the crew died from disease and accidents, the *Endeavour* limped home in 1771 with eye-opening reports of curiosities including erotic Tahitian dances and, from Australia, a leaping, pouched quadruped so difficult for Europeans to classify that Cook's botanist called it an '80-pound mouse'.

On a return voyage (1772–75), Cook became the first navigator to pierce the Antarctic Circle, circling the globe near its southernmost latitude and demolishing the ancient myth that a vast, populous and fertile continent surrounded the South Pole. Cook also crisscrossed the Pacific from Easter Island to Melanesia, charting dozens of islands between. Though Maori killed and cooked 10 sailors, the captain remained strikingly

sympathetic to islanders. 'Notwithstanding they are cannibals', he wrote, 'they are naturally of a good disposition'.

On Cook's final voyage (1776–79), in search of a Northwest Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific, he became the first European to visit Hawai'i, and sailed along North America's west coast from Oregon to Alaska. Forced back by Arctic pack ice, Cook returned to Hawai'i, where he was killed during a skirmish with islanders who had initially greeted him as a Polynesian god. In a single decade of discovery, Cook had filled in the map of the Pacific and, as one French navigator put it, 'left his successors with little to do but admire his exploits'.

Cook's legacy extends far beyond his Pacific charts, though some of them were so accurate that they remained in use until the 1990s. His journeys were the first true voyages of scientific discovery, aboard ships filled with trained observers: artists, astronomers, botanists – even poets. Their detailed observations helped lay the foundation for modern disciplines such as anthropology and museum science, and inspired Western writers and artists to romanticise the South Pacific as an innocent paradise. The plant and animal specimens collected by Cook's men revolutionised the West's understanding of nature, seeding the notion of biodiversity and blazing a trail for Charles Darwin's voyage on the *Beagle*.

But Cook's travels also spurred colonisation of the Pacific. Within a few decades of his death, missionaries, whalers and settlers began transforming – and often devastating – island cultures. As a result, many indigenous people now revile Cook as an imperialist villain who introduced disease, dispossession and other ills to the Pacific (hence the frequent vandalising of Cook monuments). However, as islanders revive traditional crafts and practices, from tattooing to *tapa*, they have turned to the art and writing of Cook and his men as a resource for cultural renewal. For good and ill, a Yorkshire farm boy remains the single most significant figure in the shaping of the modern Pacific.

promiscuity was guarded against by nightly 'moral police' and the most 'heathen' practices such as human sacrifice were unknown. From Tahiti, Tonga and Hawai'i, Christianity spread throughout the Pacific.

The missionaries' success was due to three major factors. Clever politics played a part, particularly the conversion of influential Tongan chief Taufa'ahau and the Tahitian Pomare family. Another factor was the perceived link between European wealth and Christianity: missionaries sought to 'civilise' as well as Christianise, and islanders desired European tools and skills. Finally, the message of salvation fell on especially attentive ears because of the massive depopulation occurring through the spread of disease.

Two rather remarkable missionaries had enormous influence on the region's Christianisation: the 'plodding and laborious' John Thomas (WMS), who arrived in Tonga in 1826, and the extraordinary John Williams (LMS), who travelled between many islands from 1818 until his death in Vanuatu in 1839. Many Polynesian converts also took up missionary work themselves.

Missionaries changed the Pacific forever. While traditional culture was devastated and customs such as tattooing banned, practices such as human sacrifice and ritual warfare – ancient traditions about which it is harder to be nostalgic – were also curtailed. Missionaries shielded islanders from the excesses of some traders, and it was missionary pressure that finally put an end to the blackbirding trade (see p46). Putting Pacific languages into written form, initially in translations of the Bible, was another major contribution. While many missionaries deliberately destroyed 'heathen' Pacific artefacts and beliefs, others diligently recorded myths and oral traditions that would otherwise have been lost. A substantial portion of our knowledge of Pacific history and traditional culture comes from the work of missionary-historians.

Manoeuvres by missionaries and islanders alike resulted in substantial political changes. Ruling dynasties in Tonga, Tahiti and Fiji all owed some of their success to missionary backing – just as missionary success owed a lot to those dynasties.

TRADE Whaling

European whalers enthusiastically hunted in the Pacific from the late 18th century. The trade peaked in the mid-19th century, then declined rapidly as whale products were superseded by other materials. The effect on the Pacific's whale population was catastrophic, but the effect on Pacific islanders was complex. There were opportunities for lucrative trade as ships resupplied, and many Pacific islanders, as always fond of travel, took the opportunity to travel on whaling ships. Some islanders, however, were effectively kidnapped and forced to travel without consent; whalers of the Pacific were not the most gentle of men.

Bêches-de-Mer

Also known as *trepang*, sea cucumbers or sea slugs, the *bêche-de-mer* is a marine organism related to starfish and urchins. An Asian delicacy, Pacific *bêches-de-mer* were sought by early-19th-century European traders

For the story of the Pacific islands' most successful missionary (in the next life, if not in this one), read the boxed text on Oceania's very own patron saint, St Pierre Chanel (p812), who copped it sweet in Futuna in 1841.

Call me Queequeg: the heavily tattooed harpooner of Melville's *Moby Dick* seems to be a combination of several Pacific cultures, but from the description of his tattoos, he might have hailed from the Marquesas Islands.

Tony Horwitz is a Pulitzer-winning reporter and nonfiction author. In researching Blue Latitudes (also published as Into the Blue), Tony travelled the Pacific – 'boldly going where Captain Cook has gone before'.

1890–1903

French postimpressionist Paul Gauguin retreats to Tahiti and the Marquesas to devote his life to art

1918–19

Spanish influenza ravages Tonga, Nauru, Fiji and Samoa

1942–45

WWII fighting in the Solomons, PNG and Micronesia; Fijian Corporal Sefania Sukanaivalu is awarded the Victoria Cross

1947

Thor Heyerdahl (rather pointlessly) sails the balsa raft *Kon Tiki* from Peru to the Tuamotus

to exchange for Chinese tea. *Bêches-de-mer* were relatively abundant, and important trading relations were forged with islanders. For the most part the trade was mutually beneficial, with islanders trading eagerly for metal, cloth, tobacco and muskets. The trade in *bêches-de-mer* was largely nonviolent, in contrast with the sandalwood trade.

Sandalwood

Nineteenth-century Europeans trading with China found another Pacific resource in fragrant sandalwood, used in China for ornamental carving and cabinet-making, as well as for burning as incense. By the 1820s these traders had stripped the sandalwood forests of Hawai'i, and forests on islands to the south were sought. Extensive sandalwood forests on Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomons and New Caledonia became the focus for traders keen to satisfy the demands of the Chinese market.

On each new island, payment for sandalwood was initially low. A small piece of metal, a goat or a dog was sometimes sufficient to buy a boatload of the aromatic wood. But as the supply of slow-growing sandalwood dwindled, the price rose – islanders demanded guns, ammunition, tobacco or assistance in war as payment.

While the sandalwood trade in Fiji was fairly orderly under the supervision of local chiefs, spheres of chiefly influence in the Solomons, Vanuatu and New Caledonia were much smaller and traders had difficulty establishing lasting relationships with islanders. The sandalwood trade was the most violent of any trades in the Pacific, and the Melanesians' savage reputation in Europe was not improved. There were many attacks on ships' crews, sometimes motivated by a greed for plunder, but often these attacks were a response to previous white atrocities. Melanesians assumed that all Europeans belonged to the one kin-group, and thus were accountable for another's crimes.

The sandalwood trade was far from sustainable. Island after island was stripped of its forests, and the trade petered out in the 1860s with the removal of the last accessible stands.

BLACKBIRDING

In the late 19th century cheap labour was sought for various Pacific industries such as mines and plantations. Pacific islanders were also 'recruited' to labour in Australia, Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa and Peru. Satisfying the demand for labour was a major commercial activity from the 1860s.

In some cases islanders were keen to sign up, seeking to share the benefits of European wealth. Often, though, islanders were tricked into boarding ships, either being deceived about the length of time for which they were contracted, or sometimes enticed aboard by sailors dressed as priests. In many cases no pretence was attempted: islanders were simply herded onto slaving ships at gunpoint.

The populations of many small, barely viable islands were devastated by blackbirders – Tokelau lost almost half its population to Peruvian slaving ships in 1863, while the Tongan island of 'Ata lost 40% of its population, and as a result is today uninhabited. People were also taken as slaves from Tuvalu, New Caledonia, Easter Island, Vanuatu and the Solomons.

Similar recruitment practices – trickery and deceit – were common when Indian labourers were transported to Fiji in the 1870s (see p140).

Blackbirding was finally halted at the end of the 19th century, largely as the result of persistent lobbying by missionaries. Their campaigns in Britain and Australia resulted in the banning of overseas-labour recruitment to Australia (in 1904), Samoa (in 1913) and Fiji (in 1916). Some islanders were restored to their homelands, but many never returned. A sizable Melanesian population remains in Australia's Queensland, and of course there is a huge Indian population in Fiji (see p140).

EPIDEMICS & DEPOPULATION

A population of a certain size is required for a contagious disease to establish itself. For the most part, Pacific islands lacked that population. The larger landmasses of Melanesia had (and still have) malaria, but the smaller islands of Micronesia and Polynesia knew only mild outbreaks of leprosy and filariasis (a form of elephantiasis). The squalid, populous cities of 18th- and 19th-century Europe, on the other hand, bred diseases (and resistant survivors) rather more effectively. The infection-ridden vessels of explorers, missionaries and traders brought diseases to which

'Once the people were on board they locked them up and sailed away. Two men escaped and swam back to shore, but the rest were never seen again.' Kelese Simona, from Nukulaelae (p746), recalls his father's eyewitness account of the day in 1863 that blackbirders kidnapped 70% of the island's population.

HISTORICAL HOTSPOTS IN THE PACIFIC

- National museums are often the best place to find artefacts and information about the country's past. Some of the best can be found in Suva (Fiji; p166), Noumea (New Caledonia; p315), Tahiti (French Polynesia; p597) and Port Vila (Vanuatu; p767).
- Concrete remains of the Pacific's ancient past are rare but impressive. Lean your back on Tonga's massive trilithon (p703), or climb through tangled undergrowth to stone *marae* on Rarotonga (p443) or Aitutaki (p456) in the Cook Islands. But most of all, make sure you see the Pacific's most impressive sites: the ancient city of Nan Madol (p114) in Pohnpei and the famous *moai* (standing statues) of Easter Island (p86).
- The best way to find out about local stories is to spend some quality time around the kava bowl with a local historian; chew the fat in a Vanuatuan *nakamal* (kava house; p761) or track down one of Samoa's *tulafale* (well-named 'talking chiefs'; p480).
- Devotees of European explorers (p41) should visit Umatac (p229), where the Pacific (Guam) first met Europe (Magellan); Point Vénus (p596) is the site of James Cook's first base on Tahiti, and if you make it to Hawai'i, visit Kealahou, where he met his grisly end.
- Pitcairn Island, with its tales of mutiny and murder, is a source of constant fascination. If you can't get to the island itself (p419), rent one of the myriad movies (p424) inspired by the mutiny.
- WWII history buffs will find plenty to pique their interest: divers can swim through WWII wrecks in Vanuatu (p793), the Solomons (p560) and Chuuk (Federated States of Micronesia; p124). Above the waves, see the memorials and carefully restored gun emplacements of Guam (p227) or the rusting WWII remains of Tuvalu's Nanumea Atoll (p746).
- A rather grim itinerary can be followed by tracing the Pacific's involvements in the nuclear arms race. The 1945 bombing raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were launched from Tinian (p384) in the Northern Marianas, and nuclear testing has most famously been carried out on Bikini (p281) and Moruroa (p584).

1958

'Wash that man right out of my hair' – the dreadfully camp musical *South Pacific* is unleashed upon the world

1962–80

Independence: Western Samoa (1962), Nauru (1968), Fiji (1970), Tuvalu (1975), Solomons (1978), Kiribati (1979), Vanuatu (1980)

1971

Establishment of the South Pacific Forum (now the Pacific Islands Forum)

1979–94

The US Trust Territory is dismantled; Micronesian nations sign Compacts of Free Association with the US

the peoples of the Pacific had little or no resistance: cholera, measles, smallpox, influenza, pneumonia, scarlet fever, chickenpox, whooping cough, dysentery, venereal diseases and even the common cold all took a terrible toll on islanders.

Almost all Polynesian populations fell by at least half, while Micronesia and Melanesia's populations suffered even more. Some Micronesian islands were reduced to 10% of their previous population level, and some islands of Vanuatu dropped to just 5%. More recently, the post-WWI influenza epidemic of 1918–19 devastated Tonga (killing 8% of the population), Fiji (5%), Nauru (16%) and Samoa (where 22% of the population died within a few months).

EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

Once European traders were established in the Pacific, many began agitating for their home countries to intervene and protect their interests. Some missionaries also lobbied for colonial takeover, hoping that European law would protect islanders from the lawless traders! Gradually, and sometimes reluctantly, European powers acted by declaring protectorates and then by annexing Pacific states.

Germany was perhaps the one country that was *not* reluctant. Between 1878 and 1899 it annexed the Marshall Islands, northern Solomons, Nauru, the Marianas, Palau, the Carolines (now in the Federated States of Micronesia) and Samoa. The latter treaty ceded American Samoa to the US, joining the Phoenix Islands (now in Kiribati), which the US and Britain had claimed in 1836. After annexing French Polynesia (1840s) and New Caledonia (1853), the French lost interest for a while before claiming Wallis & Futuna (1880s) and going into partnership with Britain in Vanuatu in 1906.

Contrary to popular opinion, Britain was a reluctant Pacific-empire builder. However, it ended up with the largest of all Pacific empires, after being forced by various lobby groups to assume responsibilities for the Phoenix Islands in 1836, then Fiji, Tokelau, the Cooks, the Gilbert & Ellice Islands (modern Kiribati and Tuvalu), the southern Solomons and Niue between 1874 and 1900, and finally Vanuatu in 1906. Between 1900 and 1925, Britain happily offloaded the Cooks, Niue and Tokelau to eager New Zealand.

WWI & WWII

WWI had little effect in the Pacific, except to exchange German colonial rulers in Micronesia, Samoa and Nauru for Japanese, New Zealand, Australian and British rule. Germany, slightly preoccupied with events in Europe at the time, didn't resist these Pacific takeovers. When the US joined the war, the German gunboat *Cormoran* was scuttled by its crew in Guam's harbour to avoid capture.

In contrast, the Pacific was a major arena of conflict during WWII. The war with Japan was fought through the Micronesian territories Japan had won from Germany in WWI, in PNG and in the Solomon Islands.

Initially Japan expanded south and southwest from its Micronesian territories almost unhindered until 1942, when they were turned back from PNG at the Battle of the Coral Sea and in the north Pacific at the

Battle of Midway. From 1944 the US pushed the stubbornly defending Japanese back, island by island. US bombers based in the Marianas punished Japanese cities for 10 months until 6 August 1945, when the *Enola Gay* took off from Tinian (Northern Marianas) to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Days later another was dropped on Nagasaki, and the Pacific war was over.

The suffering of islanders during the Pacific war was immense: Japanese forces in Micronesia forced the transport of large numbers of islanders between various islands, seemingly without motive. People were concentrated in areas without adequate food, thousands died from hunger and thousands more were executed by the Japanese as an Allied victory became apparent. It is difficult to establish the frequency of rape of islanders by both Japanese and Allied forces, but it is undeniable that it happened.

Many Pacific islanders fought in the war, seeing action in the Pacific, Africa and Europe. Soldiers from Fiji, the Solomons, Samoa, Tonga, Palau, Pohnpei, French Polynesia and New Caledonia served in the armed forces. Their valour cemented relations with white allies.

WWII had a lasting effect on the region. Most obviously, Japan's Micronesian colonies were taken over by the US, becoming the Trust Territory of the Pacific islands. However, the war also left a legacy of more widespread and subtle effects. There was a huge improvement in roads and other infrastructure on many islands. There was also an input of money, food and other supplies that contributed towards the development of so-called 'cargo cults', whose devotees believed the goods were gifts from ancestral spirits.

WWII also hastened the end of traditional colonialism in the Pacific, the relative equality between white and black US soldiers prompting islanders to question why they were still subservient to the British and the French. Many independence leaders were influenced at this time.

POSTWAR PACIFIC

From Samoa in 1962 through to Vanuatu in 1980, most of the Pacific island states gained independence (or partial independence) from their former colonial rulers. This was a relatively bloodless transition, with colonial masters as keen to ditch their expensive responsibilities as islanders were to gain independence. It took longer for the US to dismantle its Trust Territory of Micronesia, slowed by their desire to maintain a military presence in the region. Between 1975 and 1990, however, each of those Micronesian states (except Guam) achieved some level of independence. At the beginning of the 21st century only a handful of Pacific territories are still in the hands of the US, France, Chile and New Zealand. The UN is working with most of these to further increase their independence.

Sobering reminders of WWII in the Pacific include diveable shipwrecks in Vanuatu (p793) and the FSM (p124), aircraft wrecks on Tuvalu's Nanumea Atoll (p746) and Guam's memorial parks (p227).

The Pacific Island Report (<http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport>) is an invaluable tool for keeping up with what's happening in the Pacific islands today.

Perhaps the best of the books written by British colonial servants in the Pacific is *Pattern of Islands* (1954) by the wonderful Arthur Grimble, who describes the British Empire as the 'cult of the great god Jingo' and himself as its 'pinkish' representative.

1987

The Fijian coups: Rabuka takes over government; Fiji is declared a republic and dismissed from the Commonwealth

1996

The end of nuclear testing in the Pacific: last bombs detonated at Moruroa Atoll

2000

Lonely Planet publishes *South Pacific* for the first time; Fiji suffers another coup

2001–05

Australia negotiates its 'Pacific Solution', imprisoning asylum seekers in PNG and Nauru

The Culture

There are as many Pacific cultures as there are islands scattered from Palau to Easter Island, each isolated enough from the other to have evolved a distinctive way of life. With so much diversity, every generalisation is paired with its own exception, and the more you try to define the Pacific, the more it wants to invite you to the kava bowl and tell you to take it easy.

The area breaks down into Polynesia (Greek for 'many islands'), the un-PC-named Melanesia ('black islands') and the oft-forgotten Micronesia ('small islands'). Many of the people of the Pacific share a common ancestry in the Lapita people (see the boxed text, p39), though from this shared history each nation has developed a unique culture.

THE PACIFIC PSYCHE

Ever since Europeans have been journeying to the Pacific, they've been describing its islands as paradise on earth. The 18th-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau fantasised that the islands were a return to the innocence of Eden, populated by angelic beings who knew no guilt, ambition or social strictures. He dubbed these people 'noble savages' and believed their lifestyle was a panacea to the Industrial Revolution which was infecting Europe at the time. When almost a century later Rousseau's countryman Paul Gauguin returned from Tahiti and the Marquesas with images of idyllic islands and angelic women, the islands were confirmed an earthly paradise.

Ironically for people believed to be living in heaven on earth, islanders converted to Christianity in great numbers (see p54). While every other tourist brochure will tell you that the Pacific is a paradise, its denizens are far more diverse than Rousseau's escapist fantasies suggested, and more complex than the simple faces Gauguin depicted. For a look at the individual societies read the Culture section for each country.

Contrary to Rousseau's idea of a simple life free from rules, most Pacific islands share the common notion of *tapu* (or taboo, as it became pronounced in English), which holds certain objects or practices as sacred. It remains one of the common beliefs passed on by the Lapita people who originally settled the islands, though it is interpreted differently from country to country. You only need to see how seriously some islanders observe the Sabbath to lose your ideas about a carefree people.

Melanesian communities were generally small – less than a few hundred people – with a 'bigman' as ruler. Hereditary factors were important in selecting a Melanesian bigman, but the individual's ambition and skills in politics and war were equally important. Power was hereditary on the male

'The Pacific is a huge ocean, and the capacity of Pasifikas to do well comes from the acknowledgement that we are not from small islands; we are from the largest ocean.' Samoan poet Rev Mua Strickson-Pua, quoted in *Children of the Migration* (2004).

TOP WEBSITES

- www.abc.net.au/arts/artok – an excellent backgrounder in Pacific art and culture, though the site suffers from not being updated on a regular basis
- www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/world/pacific/islands/islands.html – this excellent site has heaps of art objects and a searchable database
- www.tautaipacific.com – a NZ-based trust that supports modern Pacific artists, founded by Samoan Fatu Feu'u

side only in some Polynesian societies, with the most senior male serving as *ariki*, *ari'i* or *ali'i* (chief) and with subchiefs and commoners beneath them, and it was strictly hierarchical in the islands of Hawai'i, Tonga and Tahiti. Unsurprisingly, after the arrival of Europeans these societies became single-ruler 'countries', which soon resembled traditional monarchies. In egalitarian Samoa, *matai* (chiefs) were selected on the grounds of political nous and ability rather than lines of descent. The power of chiefs and monarchies have now waned, but Tonga retains its royal lineage and Samoa's chiefs are exclusively eligible for election to parliament.

The central role of reciprocity in Melanesian culture has created a reputation for generosity and friendliness. In the past, aid in the form of food or labour would be given out of a sense of duty and with the expectation of the favour being returned in the future. Trade was a basis of the culture and the relationships involved in exchange rituals, whether between individuals or clans, were very complex. Today most Melanesians continue to operate on this loose sense of karma, though the methods of exchange have been made more simple by the introduction of currency.

Family is key to islanders' perceptions of themselves, even when migrating to other countries. In some parts of Melanesia languages evolved around family groups, with common languages being spoken by a larger group. Ancestor worship took this reverence of kin to a spiritual level and many Pacific islanders still believe strongly in the family unit, often sending money or gifts home to older parents when they migrate.

Similarly, Polynesians have a strong respect for the family. Their tribal groups were based on extended family and the introduction of Christianity the importance of these ties for many Polynesians. Today many small businesses are run by families with extended families serving as additional employees or affiliates; don't be surprised if a guesthouse owner's cousin offers tours or other complementary services.

Another common conception of the Pacific is that it is home to a peaceful agrarian life of subsistence farming. In many countries this seems true, with almost 87% of Solomon Islanders leading rural lives, but in Fiji just over half of its citizens live in rural areas, with the larger urban areas attracting people from outer islands. Add to the mix nations like Nauru and Tuvalu, where environmental conditions are making farming increasingly difficult, and the rural image is less than universal. While many Melanesians continue to use traditional methods of fishing or agriculture, some islands are striking it rich; for example, Tuvalu by selling its .tv Internet domain name and Vanuatu by continuing to be one of the world's sunnier tax havens.

LIFESTYLE

The family is a vital element of islander society, reflecting the traditional clan basis of many Pacific communities. You can expect to be asked about your own family on numerous occasions, and some visiting couples become annoyed by the ubiquitous question: 'When are you going to have children?' Raising children is a shared activity in many countries, with children often invited to join in communal activities, and disciplining by other parents is not uncommon.

Many islanders are seeing their traditions challenged by globalisation as they become more urbanised. The struggle between *kastom* (custom) and capitalism continues in places like Guam where textile sweatshops have been introduced at the cost of agriculture. Pacific islanders have a troubled relationship with the minimum wage as many fear that increases in the weekly pay packet will scare off business and result in

The days of receiving Cook Islands postcards from your accountant may be history thanks to the newly established Pacific Anti-Money Laundering Program (PALP). The US Government has thrown in US\$1.5 million to the organisation to clean up money laundering in the Pacific that is costing Americans billions.

more unemployment. In 2005 the minimum wage of tuna workers in American Samoa, for example, was increased to US\$3.70 per hour, creating fears that tuna canneries would relocate to Mexico. Other professions in American Samoa have a significantly lower minimum wage, and in some Pacific nations the minimum wage is as low as US\$2 (Marshall Islands). In contrast the US minimum wage is US\$5.15 per hour, while in Australia it's over US\$9.

The position of women in the Pacific is improving, though it can still be disturbing to female travellers. Female visitors may encounter everyday sexism such as being leered at while swimming, but for Pacific women the effects are more far-reaching. They are less likely to be employed and are typically poorer paid; in fact, some studies estimate that less than a third of the female populations of Fiji, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu work outside of the home.

A darker side of gender relations is that Melanesia is plagued by domestic violence. Recent studies in Fiji reported that four out of five women were abused in their own home, but less than three-quarters of these women went to the police. A pan-Pacific effort to reduce domestic violence has been led by various NGOs and there are some local success stories, with the Fijian government discussing the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act in 2005 to create tougher penalties and make the reporting of violence easier.

Attitudes to homosexuality in the Pacific vary considerably, and in some parts of the region the practice is technically illegal (see the Directory, p829). In more conservative areas religious leaders work themselves into a lather about it, as witnessed in Fiji when 3000 Methodists took to the streets protesting 'ungodly acts' in 2005.

Elsewhere attitudes are more enlightened. Tahitian *mahu* (men who act like women; see the boxed text, p585), for example, are respected within their culture and are openly gay. Similarly, in Tonga the 'third-gendered' *fakaleiti* can be bisexual and their cross-dressing skills are celebrated in the Miss Galaxy Pageant (see p690). Their equivalent in Samoa are called *fa'afafine*.

POPULATION

The population of the South Pacific islands is around 1.9 million (1.4 million people in Melanesia and 500,000 in Polynesia). Increasingly, populations are becoming coastal, urbanised and often focused on a main island.

The Pacific islands have always experienced diaspora, with more than 15% of Pacific islanders living in other countries around the Pacific rim, particularly New Zealand (NZ) (210,000), mainland US (154,000) and Australia (65,000). During the 1960s NZ became such a heavenly place to migrate to that it was known as Godzone and today one in 16 Kiwis is actually an islander.

Islanders living abroad maintain their community, culture and language, particularly by making waves in the arts (see p55).

SPORT

Sport vies with religion for importance throughout the Pacific islands, and on islands such as Fiji and Samoa prowess on the rugby field often translates into status or political power. Football of several varieties is played throughout the islands during winter but it is rugby union that is most popular, with teams from Tonga, Fiji and Samoa competing in the fiercely competitive Pacific Tri-Nations. In 2005 this competition

TIPS ON MEETING LOCALS

Want to get chatting with the locals? A good conversation starter is often sports such as rugby or netball: 'Can Fiji/Samoa/Tonga knock over the Kiwis at the next Commonwealth Games?' You should avoid politics or world affairs as attitudes can vary from place to place. Given that many islanders travel around the world, they may want to talk about where you're from and they're almost guaranteed to have a relative who moved to Auckland, Sydney or Wisconsin.

Observe these simple rules when visiting traditional villages:

- Remove your shoes when entering a home
- Sit cross-legged on the floor, rather than with your feet pointing out
- Avoid entering a house during prayers
- Avoid walking between two people in conversation
- Try to remain on a lower level than a chief to show respect

For more information on responsible travel, see p32.

determined which team would play in the Rugby World Cup, with the lowest of the three playing against the Pacific's other rugby-obsessed countries: Vanuatu, Tahiti, Niue and the Cook and Solomon Islands.

American football holds sway in American Samoa, with players like Tui Alailefaleula, Toinu Fonoti and Joe Salave'a all playing in the US-based National Football League (NFL). More obscure is the popularity of Australian Rules football in Nauru, where it has been played since the 1930s; today the Chiefs, the national team, can hold their own in the International Cup.

In villages across the Pacific, Saturday is the day for inter-village (and sometimes inter-island) netball, with games focused in the winter season, though they can be played year-round. There's strong grass-roots support in Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga, Niue and the Solomon and Cook Islands, and the countries often fight it out in Olympic or Commonwealth Games. Traditional rivals Fiji and Samoa are rated among the top 10 teams in the world, with Fiji slated to host the 2007 World Netball Championships. While netball provides an important way for women to keep up contact with other villages, it is also becoming popular among men, even in macho Samoa.

One of the region's many colonial legacies is a summer game of cricket; it's most popular in Fiji and the Cook Islands, though you'll also hear the cracking of willow in Tonga. In Samoa there's a pitch in almost every village but it's usually used for the local game, *kirikiti*, which has a lot in common with cricket but throws in an extra bowler and commonly features singing and dancing from the batting team; see the boxed text, p481. Tokelau's brand of cricket, *kilikiti*, uses a three-sided bat and has teams that include most of the village. In Tonga, *lanita* (a bat and ball game) is another variation on traditional cricket.

Not surprisingly, given the islands' shared maritime history, canoeing is another sport common to most Pacific nations. The sport is a great source of national pride at events such as the annual Hawaiki Nui va'a (canoe) race in French Polynesia and the South Pacific Games. Set to be held in Samoa in 2007 and New Caledonia in 2011, the South Pacific Games is a multisport event that showcases the region's best athletes. On a smaller scale, the Micronesian Games (last held in the Northern Marianas in 2006) bring out the competitive streak in the smaller islands.

Not all power in the Pacific belongs to men. In the Marshall Islands tribe structures are matrilineal (based on who your mother is) and land has always been communally owned. Disappointingly, in February 2006 laws were debated to make land ownership tied to men only.

The tiny nation of Fiji has 80,000 registered rugby players from its total population of 950,000 – almost 12%.

RELIGION

Before the Europeans arrived, ancestor worship and magic were common beliefs in Melanesia, while in Polynesia a variety of gods were worshipped.

Melanesia's ancestor worship and sorcery were essential to every aspect of daily life, with spells cast for success in war, fishing and health. Head-hunting and cannibalism were practised as sacred rituals as late as the 1950s, and in the Solomons and Vanuatu *kastom* continues to preserve the sacredness of traditions which have remained the same for centuries and which it is forbidden to question.

Across Polynesia, religious beliefs were remarkably similar because of the islands' common ancestry. The Polynesian pantheon was ruled by Tangaroa (Tangaloa or Ta'aroa) and included several lesser gods who divvied up the duties for the seas, forests, war, crops and other important aspects of life. While there were many commonalities within Polynesia, each myth had a different interpretation or elaboration (see the boxed text, below).

Existing as a separate class alongside Polynesian chiefs, and often sharing their power, the priests known as *tohunga* (*tohu'a* or *kahuna*) were the keepers of Polynesian religion. As well as having divine knowledge such as creation myths or rituals, these priests were also interpreters of the gods' wills for the village. They could act as vital checks to ambitious chiefs or form an alliance of considerable political power by joining with them.

Christianity arrived in various forms in the early 19th century, and the race to convert the Pacific was on. Catholics began their proselytising in the Marianas while Protestants converted the Marshalls, with the two faiths meeting somewhere near Chuuk and Nauru; much of Micronesia is influenced by these two religions. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the Mormon Church met with a degree of success due to the stress placed on family values, including the ability to baptise ancestors retrospectively.

Traditional beliefs were incorporated, but overall Christianity has come to dominate spiritual life in the Pacific today. The popularity of church singing in both Micronesia and Polynesia is testament to the missionaries' early efforts. Only Fiji, with its large Hindu and Muslim Indo-Fijian population, has significant numbers of non-Christians, though there is some tension between the two groups (see p140).

MAUI'S FISH Errol Hunt

A legend common to many Pacific cultures features the demigod Maui – a trickster, fool, hero, Polynesian Prometheus and first-rate fisherman. In this traditional tale, Maui is said to have fished one or more of the islands in the group up out of the ocean depths, but each island has its variations on the story.

In Tokelau Maui hauled up each of the three coral atolls in that group; while fishing up Rakahanga in the Cooks he baited his hook with coconuts and leaves; he used a fish-hook fashioned from the jawbone of his grandmother in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and baited it with blood from his own nose; and on various islands of French Polynesia his bait was either his own ear or sacred crimson feathers. However the hook was baited, it caught onto the largest fish ever seen.

Maui's struggles to land his Leviathan were aided by various magical chants and spells – and his prize was a fish so large that it formed the island of Rakahanga or Tongatapu, or whichever island is appropriate to the teller of the tale.

Maui's other contributions to humanity included stealing fire from the gods, slowing the path of the sun and creating the first dog. One of his major appeals to Polynesian society seems to be the use of trickery to defeat force. No Hollywood-style hero, Maui is fondly remembered as being particularly ugly.

Southwestern Melanesia left the Christian fold to join cargo cults when US troops introduced material goods during WWII. The Melanesians believed that the goods were gifts from ancestral spirits.

ARTS Architecture

Traditional architecture throughout the Pacific had to adapt to very different conditions and would often need to be rebuilt after storms or war. Traditional Samoan *fale* (houses) are constructed without walls, but with woven blinds that can be lowered for harsher weather, while Fijian *bure* have walls and roofs of reeds or woven palms. Modern building materials are used today, with only large ceremonial buildings being constructed in the traditional fashion.

In Polynesia the *marae* (or *malae*) was the village meeting point and was open to both men and women. Villages may have several *marae* dedicated to different gods or religious practices. In western Polynesia, *marae* were simply village greens, possibly walled off with matting, while in the east they became elaborate structures. In Easter Island, the Societies, Australs and Marquesas *marae* were impressive open-air, paved temples with altars, carved-stone seating, platforms and walls, though only ruins and petroglyphs remain. In the Marquesas the *me'ae* were constructed from basalt blocks and were venues for religious acts of sacrifice and cannibalism.

Men's houses are still widespread throughout Melanesia and are often a village's dominant building. Their design symbolises the female and fecundity, with intricate carvings, towering facades and detailed interiors. They often employ complex joinery to create sturdy structures without the benefit of a single nail or screw. Throughout Melanesia secret councils of men continue to convene in these houses to practise rituals and produce traditional crafts.

In terms of modern architecture one of the highlights is undeniably New Caledonia's Tjibaou Culture Centre (see p315), which draws on traditional village architecture and mythology. Despite being designed by an Italian architect, this truly distinctive building uses timbers and styles which look to the region's past. Another thoroughly modern architectural feat is reputedly the largest K-mart in the world in Guam, a nod to the new lifestyle many Pacific islanders are embracing.

Cinema & TV

The Pacific has always fascinated film-makers, though many from the mainstream see it as an attractive backdrop and only superficially explore its culture. Hollywood's take on James Michener's novels *Return to Paradise* (1953) and *South Pacific* (1958) have plenty of postcard images, even if the former was shot in Samoa while the latter was filmed in Hawai'i, Malaysia and, ahem, Spain. The original *Blue Lagoon* (1979) and the Brooke Shields remake both feature the Yasawa Islands, while the Tom Hanks vehicle *Cast Away* (2001) was shot on location in Fiji.

But some directors have probed beneath the postcard veneer and shown the world the real Pacific. The pioneering director Dennis O'Rourke filmed political documentaries such as *Yap – How Did You Know We Would Like TV* (1980), which records the arrival of television on the small island, and *Half Life* (1985), a testimony to the nuclear chill that the Cold War cast over the Pacific. Continuing this tradition is the Annual International Oceania Documentary Film Festival, held annually in Pape'ete's cultural centre, which features several films made by Pacific islanders. In 2005 films included *The New Oceania* (2005), retelling the life of Samoan writer Albert Wendt, and *The Disappearing Tuvalu* (2005), documenting the impact of global warming on the small island nation. For a range of must-see movies with a Pacific island theme, see p31.

'Throughout Melanesia secret councils of men continue to convene...to practise rituals and produce traditional crafts'

French reality-TV show *Koh Lanta* (2004) famously shot a series on New Caledonia's Île des Pins, with the main object not to 'survive' but to work together to find a winner.

The resurgence of Pacific islander actors who are making names for themselves in NZ has led to the phenomenon of Polywood. The current pinnacle of this success would have to be the animated TV series *Bro'town*, a politically incorrect look at the life of Samoan boys growing up in South Auckland. Made by a troupe of Samoans and Niueans calling themselves the Naked Samoans, the series has enjoyed considerable success in NZ and Fiji, with pirate DVDs doing a roaring trade elsewhere in the Pacific. Several of the Naked Samoans appear in the feature film *Sione's Wedding* (2006) and in *Children of the Migration* (2004), which have different takes on Pacific islanders in NZ. In the US, Fijian Vilsoni Hereniko attempted to show the real Pacific to Hollywood with his feature *Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf* (*The Land Has Eyes*; 2005).

But for many visitors the Pacific is the land of the *Survivor* TV series, which has seen several series made in the region: *Survivor Marquesas* (2002), *Survivor Vanuatu – Islands of Fire* (2004) and *Survivor Palau* (2005). While it may not be encouraging greater understanding of the Pacific, the show was recently responsible for a 40% increase in tourists to Palau after New York Fire Department Lieutenant Tom Westman won the reality-TV show.

Literature

The distinctive writing culture of the Pacific remains healthy despite problems of distance and lack of publisher interest. Writers such as the influential Samoan Albert Wendt have found success in NZ and based themselves there. Other Pacific writers were born in NZ but have drawn on their Pacific heritage in their work. Tusiata Avia's first book of poetry, *Wild Dog Under My Skirt*, takes a humorous look at her Samoan roots, while the Samoan novelist Sia Fiegl received such praise for her debut title *Where We Once Belonged* that she has become the first lady of Pacific literature and regularly tours her work throughout Australia, Europe and the US.

Much like NZ, Hawai'i is another powerhouse of Pacific literature, with small presses like Tin Fish Press (www.tinfishpress.com) publishing and championing Pacific writers. One international success story is Fijian Vilsoni Hereniko, a playwright who immigrated to Hawai'i and has begun making feature films about the Pacific, including *Pear Ta Ma 'on Maf* (*The Land Has Eyes*). The University of Hawai'i Press has always been an excellent supporter of Pacific writers.

Of course, Europeans have been scribbling about the Pacific for centuries, from Jack London to James Michener and Paul Theroux. Some authors settled in the Pacific paradise: Robert Louis Stevenson relocated to Samoa, while Herman Melville based his *Typee* on four months' desertion from a whaling boat on the Marquesas Islands. Other authors just breezed through, including Joseph Conrad who used his merchant naval career as research for *Victory*.

Music & Dance

Diversity is the byword for Pacific music, with enough variety to put the wind up any stereotyped grass-skirt preconceptions you might have had. Group dancing is a part of many rituals across the islands, and with the arrival of Christianity, church singing became popular with many islanders.

Siva, the traditional Samoan dance, has a Hawaiian feel with slow hand movements which often relate a narrative. Fijian *meke* act as melodic oral histories, telling the stories of battle, appointments of chiefs or gossip, with

TOP READS

- *Where We Once Belonged* (Sia Fiegl) – scoring the Commonwealth Prize for Best Novel, this rich evocation of a Samoan girl's rite of passage expertly meanders through several stories.
- *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (Albert Wendt) – by another Samoan writer, this three-generation epic is an insight into the 'aiga (family).
- *Tales of the Tikongs* (Epeli Hau'Ofa) – a cheeky romp on a fictional island that pokes fun at politics and love, and has been hailed as the South Pacific *Under Milkwood*.
- *Treasure Islands* (Pamela Stephenson) – to get over her midlife crisis the gifted comedian-turned-psychologist buys a 112ft clipper and decides to retrace Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson's trip through the Pacific.
- *My Samoan Chief* (Fay G Calkins) – an American woman marries a Samoan exchange student and returns to live with him in the Pacific in a classic cross-cultural romance.

For other Pacific-oriented titles, see p30.

spears and fans as props. On the tiny Micronesian island of Yap, stick dancing uses bamboo poles to beat a rhythm in a dynamic display, though the Yapese have equally impressive sitting dances. In the Cook Islands the rhythmic *hura* dance resembles the Hawaiian hula and is rivalled only by the Tahitian *tamure* as the most seductive dance of the Pacific.

Contemporary music often draws on traditional sound, as you can hear in the tunes of the Tokelauan band Te Vaka or Fiji's acoustic guitar group Somai Serenaders, who play *sigi drigi* (sitting and drinking) usually surrounding a kava bowl. Chuukese musician Dano Benian records traditional and original music in his tiny Pohnpei studio (www.unisound.fm).

Other musicians have moved away from their homelands to find success in NZ, including NZ *Idol* winners Rosita Vai (born in Samoa) and Tongan Ben Lummis. The NZ music scene has benefited from Pacific migration to such a degree that NZ-based band Nesian Mystic coined the term Polysaturated as an album title that could describe NZ's recording industry. Many of NZ's top hip-hop artists, including Che Fu and Scribe, have Samoan heritage, while others such as NZ-based Samoan King Kapisi have enjoyed worldwide success. In the US Samoan-descended Boo-Yaa TRIBE continues to release island-inspired music like 2006's *Angry Samoans*.

Tapa

No art form is as characteristic of the Pacific as the beating of mulberry bark to create the fibrous cloth tapa. Whether it's called *siapo* in Samoa, *mahute* on Easter Island or *masi* in Fiji, this is much more than an everyday fabric used to make clothing, baskets or mats. Fijian *masi* is essential to almost every stage of life: newborn babies are swaddled in it, coffins are covered with it and brides' mothers covet top pieces for their girls' wedding garb. In Tahiti it was made in huge sheets 3m wide and hundreds of metres in length, and signified the power of a chief. Great storehouses were built for a chief's tapa, and even in death tapa would be wrapped around a chief's mausoleum to signify his power in the next life. Tonga's Queen Salote honoured the making of tapa so highly that she once observed 'Our history is written in our mats'.

When making tapa the custom was to strip the bark from the mulberry (or sometimes the breadfruit) tree then beat it into sheets on a specialised anvil. The thin sheets would then be glued together using a natural

Last Voices from Heaven (www.sivapacific.com) was a project to record the unique music of Melanesia, taking in Vanuatu and the Solomons. The resulting two albums can be sampled at this website that has an eye for people and traditions and an ear for distinctive music.

substance such as manioc root. In some communities it was believed that tapa was devalued if patterns were applied, and the more culturally valued forms were fine, simple and undecorated. In Fiji the cloth was smoked over a sugar-cane fire to produce a tan colour.

The real value of tapa was based on the ritual surrounding its creation and the community that produced it, for tapa was more than an object. It was exclusively produced by women in a communal ritual that revealed the strength of a tribe more powerfully than battle. Throughout Melanesia and Polynesia it served as a diplomatic tool; when given to another tribal group it placed the group in debt to the giver, and the receiver would have to honour this debt. Far from being a simple financial exchange, the giving of tapa established an inviolable moral agreement that was sealed by ancestral spirits and gods. To break the relationship of receiving tapa meant that ancestors would be defiled and gods could become vengeful. Some tapa objects were given more value than others in these exchanges, with baskets and mats holding particular significance.

In the 19th century European visitors to the Pacific collected little tapa, perhaps dismissing it as 'women's craft' and failing to appreciate its simplicity. With the arrival of calico and accompanying European values, the making of tapa declined. Tapa's legacy remains on several islands, though it is not made in the great quantities it once was. In Fiji the island of Vatualele is still renowned for its *masi*, while modern designers are inspired by the traditional art form; for example, former Miss Cook Islands Ellena Tavioni uses block-printing patterns that are inspired by tapa decoration on her swimwear and clothing which is exported to the US, UK and Europe.

Tattoos

The journals of European explorers such as Joseph Banks and Captain Cook are full of references to tattoos (*tatau*). Pacific islanders of both sexes were tattooed from the age of 14 to mark the onset of puberty and arrival into adulthood, and later to signify status within their tribal groups.

The apotheosis of the art was on the flesh of Marquesan warriors who 'wore' a full-body armour of toughened tattoos, including on their eyelids and tongues. In Tahiti, Samoa and Tonga tattoos were elaborate designs worn on the buttocks and hips, the natural pigments burrowed under the skin with tools of bone or shell. In Melanesia scarring of the body was a popular alternative to tattooing, although tattoos also bestowed status.

While tattoos became popular with passing European seamen in the 19th century (even Joseph Banks came home with one as a souvenir), Christian missionaries began to discourage tattooing as they believed it had satanic associations. Fijian tattooing (with its strong links to sexuality) became virtually extinct, and in more remote areas like Palau it survived until the Japanese invasion.

Samoan *tofuga* (tattooists) remain strongly traditional (see the boxed text, p483) and in Tahiti tattoos are a powerful link to precolonial cultures. The tattoo revival has seen full arm and leg designs becoming popular and even the full-body patterns are en vogue, particularly amongst Tahiti's traditional dancers. Tongans' *tatatau* (tattoos) were thought to be almost extinct, until a revival in 2003 by Samoan artist Su'a Sulu'ape Petelo.

Sculpture & Carving

Whether in wood, stone, coral or bone, sculpture is a universal form of expression across the Pacific. Given the abundance of ocean and the isolation of several atolls, the carving of war canoes was easily the most

common form of sculpture. A canoe's prow acted as an ambassador for many journeying islanders, the stylised front of the vessel clearly revealing the passengers' spiritual beliefs to those on land. On war canoes the depiction of gods of battle and death would have explicitly declared the intentions of visitors, giving them the psychological advantage of fear. In the Marquesas wooden carvings on the prow of a *tiki vaka* (canoe) depicted ancestors to protect against the dangers of the sea. Other objects, such as bailers, paddles and splash guards, were inlaid with symbolic motifs to act as protection or to bring prosperity in fishing or conflict.

Weapons and objects of war were crafted not only as martial tools but with considerable aesthetic and cultural value. Marquesan *u'u* (war clubs) are still prized by collectors for the fine-relief carvings of war gods that are depicted on two sides of the hardwood weapons. Kiribati warriors were notoriously well armoured with full-body suits woven from vegetable fibres and human hair, while wielding swords of sharks' teeth. In Polynesia woven or wooden shields often depicted protection deities, though Tongan nobles fought with whalebone shields that offered excellent protection.

One of the more popular and most misunderstood artworks were the masks and headgear that were made across the region. Most masks were never meant to be worn but were portrait-like depictions of a human face. Sometimes they were created to be destroyed in funeral pyres, or were preserved for hundreds of years and used in ongoing rituals. Other effigies and masks were built for long-dead ancestors to inhabit and watch over the clan, being given pride of place in a home or temple with much *tapu* associated with them.

In the Solomons headhunting created other ritual artefacts, with skulls used in consecration ceremonies or to mourn a chief's passing. Vanuatu was famous for its over-modelling of skulls, with clay, fibres or other materials being added to the bones to create elaborate effigies with eyes, teeth and hair, sometimes including earrings or other ornamentation. The crafting of these kinds of artefacts was the secret business of men's councils, particularly in Melanesia.

The most recognisable icons of Pacific art are the enormous *moai* which look stoically over Easter Island (see the boxed text, p86). *Moai* are similar to other eastern Polynesian statues, particularly the large stone *tiki* of the Marquesas and Tuamotu Islands. Tongans and Fijians crafted their figures from the bones and teeth of whales, which have a deep orange colour if well maintained. Tongan noblewomen wore small necklaces of whale ivory with designs that resemble Maori *tiki*.

Many wooden sculptures of the Pacific did not survive, either being burnt by missionaries as idols or looted by souvenir-hunting Europeans. Many examples of the Pacific's most impressive artworks are held in North American or European museums, such as the Marquesas collection at New York's Museum of Metropolitan Art or the pan-Pacific holdings of the British Museum.

Used in tapa across the Pacific, paper mulberry trees (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) were one of the first imports into the region, and are believed to have been brought from China as early as 600 BC.

Tattoos became de rigueur among European aristocracy in the 18th and 19th centuries. English and Norwegian kings, Russian Tsars and Bourbons of France wore Pacific-inspired tattoos under their regal robes.

Environment

THE LAND

The French explorer Dumont d'Urville conveniently divided the Pacific into three major subdivisions, largely along racial and cultural grounds: Melanesia (Greek for the 'black islands'), composed of New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji; Micronesia (the 'small islands'), the atolls and small islands north and northeast of New Guinea and the Solomons; and Polynesia ('many islands'), the huge triangle of islands bounded by Hawai'i, Easter Island and New Zealand (NZ). Although d'Urville's divisions were somewhat artificial, they continue to form a useful partitioning of the Pacific today.

Three main island types occur in the Pacific: continental, high and low. Large continental islands exist only in Melanesia (and NZ). Of the smaller islands, the 'high' ones are usually the peaks of volcanoes, whether extinct or active, while 'low' islands are generally formed by coral growth on sinking submarine volcanoes (see p734 and the boxed text, p63).

Geology

An understanding of Pacific geography is helped by some basic theory, so put your pencils down and pay attention please; there will be a test at the end.

The earth's surface is composed of seven large tectonic plates and several smaller ones, all of which 'float' on the planet's molten mantle. The floor of the Pacific Ocean is largely composed of one enormous plate (helpfully called the Pacific plate). The much smaller Nazca plate forms the Pacific's southeastern corner.

The boundary between these two plates is an 8000km line of submarine volcanoes called a 'constructive fault', running roughly north-south at the longitude of Easter Island. Basalt ejected from these volcanoes adds to the two plates and pushes them apart at a leisurely 17cm per year. The Pacific plate moves northwest, while the Nazca plate moves southeast.

Where the Pacific's plates meet neighbouring plates, a 'destructive fault' forms: the oceanic plates are forced hundreds of kilometres down into the earth's molten magma and deep trenches are formed along the seams. (The world's deepest is the Mariana Trench in Micronesia.) Molten, mineral-rich material is released from the diving plate and rises to form lines of volcanoes such as the Mariana archipelago, or the long island chain that stretches from NZ to Tonga and Samoa, then northwest through Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomons.

A glance at a map of the Pacific reveals several parallel island chains. These are 'hot spot' volcano chains. The volcanoes form where hot spots exist in the earth's mantle; then, as the ocean floor moves away to the northwest (at 17cm per year, remember), the volcanoes become extinct, often sinking beneath the sea. In the Pacific's hot-spot island chains, the youngest, still-active volcanoes are always in the southeast and the older, extinct submarine mountains or coral atolls are in the northwest. The Australs in French Polynesia are classic examples of hot-spot island chains.

The seismic activity of the area is also manifested in earthquakes, such as the one that hit Guam in 1993, and tsunamis, huge walls of water propelled by underwater earthquakes. Tsunamis can do massive damage to low-lying islands and coastal towns: 3000 people were killed by the tsunami that hit Aitape, Papua New Guinea (PNG), in 1998.

At 165.3 million sq km, the Pacific Ocean covers a third of the world's total surface. The thousands of islands of the Pacific, however, have a total land area of less than 1.3 million sq km – 85% of which is in the relatively large islands of New Guinea, New Zealand and Hawai'i.

CLIMATE

The tropical Pacific islands are generally humid, with warm and uniform air temperatures throughout the year (21°C to 28°C); see p28 for more information on climate and the division of the year into dry and wet seasons.

Most Pacific islands are well watered, but some drier regions can experience long droughts. Coral atolls lack rivers or streams and have little ground water, and so are particularly vulnerable to droughts.

In the tropics, air flowing towards the equator is deflected west by the earth's rotation. Called the trade winds, these winds blow from the south-east in the southern hemisphere and from the northeast in the northern hemisphere. The climate of the islands that face these cool, rain-carrying trade winds changes from one side of the island to the other: compare the incessant rains of Suva with the relatively arid Nadi. About Christmas time each year the prevailing easterlies of the trade winds weaken, then reverse for a time and blow from the west.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical cyclones are massive systems of winds rotating around a centre of low atmospheric pressure. The resulting torrential rains, high waves and winds, which can reach as high as 200km/h, present a hazard to shipping and can cause extensive damage to crops and buildings.

Cyclones can occur at any time but are most common during the wet season. In general, only the west Pacific experiences cyclones; however, patterns change with El Niño and La Niña events, and may be affected by global warming.

El Niño

The prevailing easterly trade winds tend to send warmer surface water towards the western Pacific, resulting in more rainfall in that region (Melanesia, Australia and NZ) than in the east.

An El Niño (more correctly 'El Niño Southern Oscillation', or ENSO) event occurs when the annual Christmas-period reversal in wind direction combines with high air pressure in the western Pacific and low air pressure in the east. The warm surface water is then blown back towards the eastern Pacific, carrying rain along with it: western Pacific countries experience droughts at this time, while eastern islands suffer unusually heavy rains or cyclones.

Although El Niño ('the Boy' or 'the Christ Child') develops in the Pacific, its effects on weather are felt worldwide. An El Niño usually lasts for about a year, and recurs irregularly every four or five years. Although only recently understood, El Niño is no recent development. Evidence shows that El Niños have occurred for at least hundreds, and probably thousands, of years. El Niños are often followed by a weaker related event called La Niña ('the Girl'), which reverses El Niño – bringing storms to the western Pacific and droughts to the east.

WILDLIFE

The Pacific is relatively spartan in its wildlife. The higher islands (Samoa and Melanesia) have the greatest diversity in flora and fauna, while smaller coral atolls and low islands can be almost desolate. Over the millennia most species moved across the ocean from west to east; thus, western islands such as the Solomons are far more diverse in flora and fauna than the eastern Societies. The spread of flora across the Pacific was in part a natural process, with seeds and fruits borne across the sea

Outside of Hawai'i, the Pacific's most accessible active volcano can be seen in Vanuatu: Mt Yasur (p781). You'll also see evidence of recent eruptions in the lava flows of Savai'i, Samoa (p506).

A matter of terminology: cyclones are called hurricanes in the Atlantic and typhoons in the western Pacific.

by winds, in bird droppings and by ocean currents. Plants such as kava, coconut, breadfruit and taro, as well as some livestock, were deliberately introduced by early Pacific settlers.

Animals

Apart from possums in the Solomons, the flying fox, or fruit bat, is the only land mammal to have made its own way to the Pacific islands. Stowaways on voyaging canoes included the Polynesian rat and the geckos (small lizards) that are now ubiquitous in the region – that flicker of movement on the bedroom wall may not be a trick of the kava, it may be a lizard keeping the mosquito population under control. Apart from the geckos, land reptiles are confined to a few snakes and monitor lizards in western Melanesia and Micronesia. Palau and the Solomons also have saltwater and freshwater crocodiles. (Adult saltwater crocs can exceed 4m in length and have been known to supplement their fish diet with humans.)

Birdlife is dominated by migratory seabirds. One of the more interesting bird types is the megapode; see the boxed text, p558.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Settlers moving into the Pacific brought domesticated dogs, chickens and pigs along with them. As ready sources of protein, some of these animals probably did not survive the voyage, but enough arrived to spread the three species across the Pacific. Wild chickens still roam and forage throughout the Pacific islands, and the pig still holds an important role in many Melanesian rituals (see p760). The Pacific dog, however, was wiped out by interbreeding and competition from European dog species. Since European contact other introduced animals have included cattle, horses, sheep and goats.

The introduction of dogs and rats, as well as humans, had a major environmental impact on isolated islands. Birds that previously had no natural predators now had to contend with several, and in many cases extinction was the result. The later introduction of cats, very efficient killing machines, caused even more extinctions.

MARINE LIFE & CORAL

Many thousands of species of fish live in the Pacific Ocean. It's impossible to describe every species you might encounter, so see the boxed text, p851 for information about a few fish you might want to avoid.

Although coral looks and behaves like a plant, it's actually a minuscule primitive carnivorous animal. Coral draws calcium from the water, then excretes it to form a hardened shell to protect its soft body. As the coral polyps reproduce and die, new polyps attach themselves in successive layers to the empty skeletons which have formed tiny rock-like limestone structures. Coral reefs are made up of millions of the coral skeletons, and in this way a coral reef grows by about 15cm per year. Only the outer layer of coral is alive; algae lives in a symbiotic relationship within the coral's tissue and gives it colour. Not only is it environmental vandalism to pluck vivid coral from the ocean, it's futile because it loses its colour when dead.

Coral is a fussy wee beast. It requires a water temperature of between 21°C and 28°C, and as the algae needs abundant sunlight the water must be mud-free and relatively shallow (less than 40m). Coral reefs form in three ways: as a fringing reef close to the land, as a barrier reef separated from the land by a stretch of water, and as a coral atoll. Coral reefs

CORAL ATOLLS

Submarine volcanoes are common on the ocean floor, and some of them grow above the sea's surface to become islands. Once an island exists, coral begins to grow around its coast. If subsequent plate movement causes the volcano to sink, the coral continues to grow in order to stay close to the sea's surface (coral requires sunlight and cannot live in water deeper than 40m). As the central island sinks, a fringing lagoon forms between the island and the reef. A coral atoll is formed when the island finally sinks completely, leaving a ring of coral encircling an empty lagoon. The first person to recognise that atolls are made from coral growth built up around the edges of submerged volcanic mountain peaks was Charles Darwin (see the boxed text, p734).

The long conversion of these coral islets to inhabitable islands begins when coral sitting above the sea's surface is broken up by waves, eventually forming a coarse, infertile soil. Seeds blown along by the wind, carried by the sea or redistributed in bird droppings can then take root. Initially, only the most hardy of plants, such as coconut palms, can survive in this hostile, barren environment. Once the pioneering coconuts have established a foothold, rotting vegetative matter forms a more hospitable soil for other plants.

The people of the Pacific islands have learned how to eke out an existence from even the smallest of coral atolls. Vegetables brought from other islands, such as taro and *kumara*, supplement what grows naturally, and fish from the sea and the lagoon provide protein. However, atoll populations live a precarious existence, as resources are scarce and the atolls are vulnerable to droughts, storms and tsunamis.

A coral atoll lifted entirely above the water's surface by geological activity is known as a *makatea*, after one such island in French Polynesia.

support throngs of fish and other marine life, and are one of the most biodiverse habitats found on earth. Thus, of course, they make excellent fishing grounds.

Corals catch their prey by means of stinging nematocysts (a specialised type of cell), and some varieties can give humans a painful sting when touched. Despite their seemingly robust nature, all corals are fragile and can be damaged by the gentlest touch. Take care to stay well back from coral growths when diving or snorkelling on the reefs (see the boxed text, p69), and avoid reef walking.

MAMMALS

Whales were plentiful in the Pacific until the arrival of whaling fleets in the 18th century. Their numbers are recovering, although this has been slowed by the continuing Japanese and Norwegian whaling industries. Attempts to establish a South Pacific whale sanctuary are continuing, the aim being to protect whales as they migrate through Pacific waters to mate and rear their young. However, there's strong opposition to a sanctuary, and not only from the whaling nations. Pacific island countries such as the Solomon Islands are wary as it would cut off whaling licences as a prospective source of income. In many Pacific countries, whale-watching tours offer a viable alternative (see the boxed text, p718).

Dolphins abound, and follow ships in the Pacific with the same enthusiasm they show elsewhere in the world. The dugong or sea cow, the source of the mermaid myth (those sea journeys must have been long indeed), thrives in the western Pacific.

REPTILES

Endangered sea turtles including hawksbills, green turtles and leatherbacks inhabit Pacific waters. They've been an important native food for centuries, and both turtles and their eggs are still occasionally eaten, particularly on more remote islands.

In many Pacific countries, whale-watching tours are a win-win alternative to whaling. See the ones that got away in Tonga (p718), Rarotonga (p446), French Polynesia (p663), American Samoa (p529), Niue (p362), New Caledonia (p349) and Fiji (p190).

'Coral reefs are made up of millions of coral skeletons'

FLORA & FAUNA OF THE PACIFIC

The following books are useful for travellers who want to learn a little more about Pacific wildlife:

- Now out of print, but worth hunting for, Dick Watling's excellent *Birds of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa* includes lavish colour illustrations of the central Pacific's bird life.
- Chris Doughty's *Field Guide to the Birds of the Solomons, Vanuatu and New Caledonia* is methodically researched and very useable in the field (if Melanesia brings out the twitcher in you).
- Worth reading before you go under, Ewald Lieske and Robert Myers' *Coral Reef Fishes* is a guide to shallow-water marine life of the Indo-Pacific and Caribbean.
- Peter Goadby's *Big Fish and Blue Water – Gamefishing in the Pacific* is an enthusiastic guide to the pleasures of killing big fish for fun.

Colourful sea snakes, highly venomous but nonaggressive, are common throughout the Pacific.

Plants

Taro is the most important crop of many islands in the Pacific, and both its spinach-like leaves and starchy corns are used as staple foods. The plantain also features in the diet of many Pacific islanders – the bananas are picked when green and cooked as a vegetable.

COCONUT

If there is a symbol of the Pacific islands, it is the coconut palm. The coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) originated in Southeast Asia and its migration across the Pacific was probably a mixture of natural processes and deliberate introduction by ancient settlers.

Without the coconut palm many small Pacific atolls and islands would never have become inhabitable. Coconuts are tolerant of sandy soils and are the only large tree that will grow on a sandy atoll islet without human assistance. The plant broke the ground for later vegetation on many small coral atolls.

Coconuts historically provided drinking water for long ocean voyages, and the tree's wood was the main building material used for voyaging canoes. On land they were vital for house and roofing materials, and the fibres were used for rope, weaving and making fire. The coconut is still economically important to many Pacific countries, providing income from sales of crude oil, coconut cream and copra.

KUMARA

While most Pacific vegetables and trees originated in the west and migrated east, the *kumara* (*kumala* or *'umala*) or sweet potato originated in South America – it is known as *kumar* in Peru.

The east-to-west movement of the *kumara* was a foundation of Thor Heyerdahl's alternative theory that the Pacific was settled from the Americas. That theory quickly fell into disfavour as the bulk of other evidence mounted towards the west-to-east migration (see the boxed text, p40). It's now believed that the *kumara* was introduced to the Pacific by Polynesians, probably Marquesans, voyaging to South America. From the Marquesas it was carried westwards, reaching western Polynesia fairly quickly and Melanesia by the 16th century.

Pacific yellow-bellied sea snakes gather in swarms at breeding season. Large swarms can be over 100km in length!

According to legend, the coconut was born when Tuna, the lover of Hina, was killed by a jealous suitor. Tuna's face is represented by the three dark depressions at the top of a coconut's shell. Push your straw through Tuna's mouth, the only depression that pierces the shell.

The *kumara*'s revolutionary effect on Pacific communities was widespread, as it is easy to grow in tropical climates and to transport by canoe.

NATIONAL PARKS

Parks and reserves are listed under individual country chapters. There are three Unesco-listed World Heritage sites in the South Pacific: East Rennell Island in the Solomons (p567), Henderson Island near Pitcairn (p427) and the Parque Nacional Rapa Nui on Easter Island (p90). As Rennell Island was one of the stepping stones in the Lapita people's settlement of the Pacific, and Henderson and Easter were among the last islands to be settled, these sites have important anthropological as well as ecological significance.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The most severe ecological danger to the nations of the Pacific is attributed to the developed world. Waste management of litter, from both the islands themselves and from rubbish drifting ashore, is another major concern. See p32 for information on responsible travel in the region.

Fishing

Commercial fishing fleets in the Pacific catch around half of the world's annual 100 million tonnes of fish. While the ocean's vast size lulls many people into believing it is an infinite resource, others claim this catch is unsustainable. Critics point out that despite the ever-increasing number of vessels in the world's fishing fleets, their annual catch is decreasing. A UN study found that most commercially exploited fisheries were being fished beyond their capacity to recover, stating that the industry is 'globally unsustainable' and that 'major ecological and economic damage is already visible'.

It is not only fish caught for consumption that are endangered; fishing fleets worldwide claim a 'bycatch' of almost 30 million tonnes per year. These are unwanted species such as dolphins, sharks and turtles that are pulled up along with the target species and then dumped. The infamous drift nets, which are legally limited to 2.5km in length but are often much longer, claim a huge bycatch.

Remnants of drift nets are often found wrapped around dead whales that wash ashore. Nets and lines that have broken loose continue to drift through the oceans, catching and killing as they go. Longlines drifting loose on the surface of the South Pacific have decimated albatross populations, bringing some species near to extinction. Closer to the coast, blast fishing and cyanide fishing – both illegal – kill everything nearby rather than just their target species.

To resource-poor Pacific islands, selling licences to fish their relatively large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) is one of their few economic options.

Deforestation

Easter Island (Rapa Nui) led the world in its deforestation efforts a thousand years before Magellan sailed into the Pacific. The resources put into constructing the famous *moai* statues of Easter Island turned the island into a desolate wasteland.

In modern times, many South Pacific governments with few other economic options have embraced logging as a necessary evil. Such logging is often undertaken by offshore companies with few long-term interests in

Avoid the following overfished species when dining out in the Pacific: swordfish, marlin, southern blue-fin tuna (albacore tuna is OK) and gemfish.

CLIMATE CHANGE & GLOBAL WARMING *Saufatu Sopoanga*

Tuvalu began to voice its concern about climate change internationally in the late 1980s. Our key concern then, and now, is sea-level rise, which has the potential to submerge the islands we call home. Successive elected governments in Tuvalu have amplified warnings of this threat.

More than 30 years ago, scientists first hinted at the possibility that manmade emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were raising the earth's atmospheric temperature, causing glaciers and polar ice to melt and sea levels to rise. Since then an impressive canon of scientific research has been published.

Thirty years later, is the sea rising? We think it is, and this view is supported by a broad scientific consensus. Estimates of sea-level rise in the southwest Pacific range between 1 and 2mm per year, confirming what we fear most. This is what science tells us and anecdotal evidence here in Tuvalu – just south of the equator, and west of the international dateline – suggests the same.

What we see in Tuvalu is marginally higher (peak) sea levels when tides are highest. This means annual high tides are creeping further and further ashore. There is crop damage from previously unseen levels of saltwater intrusion, and a higher incidence of wave washover during storms or periods of strong tidal activity.

Some commentators, journalists and scientists alike, have attributed these phenomena to construction too close to fragile lagoon foreshores or ocean fronts, or to the loss of natural coastal protection (allegedly from cutting down too many shoreline trees, shoreline mining and so forth). Whether or not this picture is accurate, this line of reasoning confuses the issue of recent material gains – principally the present level of development in Tuvalu – with sea-level rise. If the sea is rising, as local evidence suggests and scientists suspect, no amount of natural or artificial coastal protection that is not prohibitively expensive will fend it off. So-called 'adaptation' measures are a short-term fix which, however beneficial, merely delay the inevitable. Unless, of course, the worldwide volume of greenhouse gas production is cut drastically, and cut fast.

Tuvalu's nine small atolls and reef islands are geographically flat, rising no more than 4m above sea level. At any time, we are naturally concerned with the state of the sea, just as a desert nomad is with the health of an oasis. We cannot move away from our coastlines, as all the land we inhabit is coastline, right where the threat of rising sea levels is greatest. We have no continental interior where we can relocate; no high interior, as is found on a volcanic island.

Confronting the issues

Successive elected governments in Tuvalu have adopted the concept of sustainable development, and we confront its issues almost daily. But however much we try to put this concept into action locally, we also know it will not solve the problem of rising sea levels. So what else can we do?

As much as we try to meet the expectations of the international community, which demands that we include sustainable development in our national policy, our efforts on the ground have been mostly unsuccessful. (Other developing countries around the world share the same experience.)

In the context of climate change, it has become obvious to us that sustainable development – which can offer solutions to many of the issues we confront as a nation still in the early stages of growth – is clearly not a defence against sea-level rise, no matter how hard the international debate tries to connect the two. As the former chairman of the Association of Small Island States, Tuiloma Neroni Slade, recently said: 'It may be that we manage to get our sustainable development policies right. Yet we will still face the risk that all will be undermined by climate change.' This reality is an undeniably accurate view of the situation we face in the Pacific. Manmade climate change is not a Pacific invention, nor are rising sea levels our problem to fix. There is only this: Tuvalu and other Pacific island countries will be among the first to suffer the catastrophic consequences of sea-level rise.

The only international mechanism to combat climate change is the Kyoto Protocol. In the absence of potentially better alternatives – if and when they might ever appear – we have appealed

to the international community: support the provisions set out in Kyoto without reservation, and achieve its stated greenhouse gas emission targets. But that's not all. What we fear is that whether or not countries ratify Kyoto, greenhouse gas emissions will continue to grow, unless there is drastic change; for example, in how industrial countries, by far the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, use energy. Yet fossil fuel consumption continues to grow.

Not enough is being done

Policy measures and nontechnological fixes are important tools in the battle to lower greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. Examples of these measures include energy conservation, the creation of vast new carbon sinks and emissions trading. But these efforts will not stop the sea from rising unless there is widespread replacement of existing energy technology that uses carbon-based fuel to power the steam turbine and internal combustion engine. Sadly, this prospect seems highly unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Since as far back as independence in 1978, Tuvalu has consistently advocated the use of renewable energy. We have had some success with solar power, using a technology (solar photovoltaic) that is obviously compatible with sustainable development. But Tuvalu still relies predominantly on imported petroleum to meet its energy needs. To curtail this dependence in any meaningful way will require public or private investment from the international community to finance a large-scale shift to solar energy.

From where we stand, this type of large-scale renewable investment and commitment has not been forthcoming. Make no mistake, Tuvalu stands ready to enter into partnership with any industrial country or manufacturer of solar energy equipment to transform its energy sector – and to play our part, however small, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We cannot do it alone, however. Scientists sounded the alarm on climate change and atmospheric warming decades ago, and scientific research and debate have informed the majority of international public opinion. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – in thousands of pages of research documentation – has explained in detail the threat posed by manmade atmospheric warming, yet the concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is growing.

Paying the price

The effects of global warming are being felt not just in Tuvalu but everywhere. The reason why powerful decision-makers in countries who can make a difference continue to downplay the threat posed by global warming is beyond our understanding. Isn't humankind's future at risk? The biggest emitters of manmade greenhouse gases are the world's largest countries, in North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia – which comes as no surprise. Two countries, which are also the world's two most populous, China and India, represent the world's biggest future greenhouse gas emissions threat. By comparison, Tuvalu's greenhouse gas emissions are next to zero.

It is likely that in the next 50 to 100 years, if not sooner, the nine islands of Tuvalu will at best become uninhabitable, at worst they will vanish. This is based not on speculation but on mounting scientific evidence. The outlook is grim, but what can Tuvalu do? As one of my predecessors wrote: 'Tuvalu's voice in the climate change debate is small, rarely heard, and heeded not at all. Industrial countries, with all their wealth, may fret, but if atmospheric temperatures [continue to] rise, even by a few degrees, the price will be paid by the islands of Tuvalu and all low-lying land just like it'.

Prior to being appointed to the position of deputy prime minister in 2004 (with the dual portfolios of Minister of Works and Energy and Minister of Communications and Transport), Saufatu Sopoanga served as Tuvalu's ninth prime minister (2002–04).

For more information on environmental issues in the Pacific islands see the websites of the South Pacific Environment Programme (www.sids.net.org/pacific/sprep) and the United Nations Environment Programme (www.unep.ch/conventions).

The 2200-sq-km lagoon of Kwajalein Atoll (p278) in the Marshall Islands forms 'the world's largest catcher's mitt' as splashdown point for (unarmed) intercontinental missiles fired from California.

the island. Only the larger islands such as the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa have sufficient forestry reserves to hold the interest of such companies. However, even small-scale logging on smaller islands can have a devastating effect.

As well as loss of habitat for native birds and animals, deforestation leads to massive soil loss, which is particularly serious on small coral islands such as Niue, whose soil quality has never been good. Increased runoff from deforested land can lead to pollution of vital waterways, and muddying of coastal waters can severely retard the growth of coral.

Nuclear Issues

The Pacific Ocean has seen more than its fair share of nuclear explosions. In fact, in one respect it all started here: the world's only hostile use of nuclear weapons, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, were launched from the Northern Marianas. Subsequently, the US, UK and (most stubbornly) France have conducted nuclear testing here.

The nuclear testing issue loomed large at the first meeting of the South Pacific Forum (SPF, now Pacific Island Forum) in 1971. In 1986, the SPF's Treaty of Rarotonga established the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone, banning nuclear weapons and the dumping of nuclear waste. This was ratified 10 years later by France, the US and the UK.

France's Pacific nuclear testing programme commenced with atmospheric tests in 1966 at Moruroa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia. Their early atmospheric tests caused measurable increases in radiation in several Pacific countries – even as far away as Fiji, 4500km to the west. Atmospheric testing was abandoned in 1974 under severe international pressure, but underground tests (totalling 127 on Moruroa and 10 on Fangataufa) continued until 1996.

The effects of US atmospheric nuclear testing, which ceased in 1970, have rendered Rongelap and Bikini uninhabitable (although short-term visits are fine); their people live in unhappy exile on neighbouring islands. Fragile coral atolls were always a questionable place to detonate underground nuclear weapons, and the French have confirmed the appearance of cracks in the coral structure of Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls, and leakage of plutonium into the sea from Moruroa. The effect of large amounts of radioactive material leaking into the Pacific Ocean would be catastrophic and far-reaching. Claims of high rates of birth defects and cancer on neighbouring islands of French Polynesia are denied by the French, but are impossible to confirm because of the secrecy attached to government health records.

South Pacific Diving

Jean-Bernard Carillet

The South Pacific and Micronesia are as much a Garden of Eden below the waterline as on land. No doubt you'll impress your peers when you get home with stories of awesome walls, high-voltage drift dives, close encounters with sharks and manta rays, luscious soft and hard corals, iconic wrecks and gorgeous reefs replete with multihued tropical fish. As if that weren't enough, visibility is excellent, waters are warm year round, most dive centres are first rate and conditions are magnificent at most times – think turquoise coral shallows, inky-blue seas, and idyllic backdrops as you travel to and from the sites. Each island has its own personality and its distinctive assets, which make for a seemingly endless diving repertoire.

Whatever your abilities, you'll experience sensory overload while diving in the South Pacific and Micronesia. Treat yourself to a slice of underwater heaven – don your fins and mask, and jump in!

DIVING CONDITIONS

Diving is possible year round, although conditions vary according to the season and location. Visibility is reduced in the wet season, as the water is muddied by sediments brought into the sea by the rivers, and areas that are exposed to currents might also become heavy with particles. On average, visibility ranges from 15m to 50m.

In most Pacific countries the water temperature peaks at a warm 29°C during the rainy season, but can drop to 20°C in some areas, including New Caledonia and Easter Island, at certain times of the year. Though it's possible to dive without a wetsuit, most divers wear at least a Lycra outsuit to protect themselves from abrasions. A 3mm tropical wetsuit is most appropriate.

For advice on diving hazards, see p852.

DIVE SITES IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Cook Islands

There's nothing to boggle the mind in the Cook Islands but at least it offers relaxed diving for recreational divers in a safe environment. You've got a bit of everything, but on a small scale. A number of sites were battered by cyclones in 2005, and it will take time for the corals to regenerate. These

With an unrivalled variety of atmospheres, textures and shapes, the South Pacific and Micronesia are the Holy Grail of bubble-makers.

Jean-Bernard Carillet is a die-hard South Pacific lover and a diving instructor. For this book he did a grand diving tour from Easter Island to French Polynesia, the Cook Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu. He has also co-authored Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkeling the Red Sea* and *Diving & Snorkeling Tahiti & French Polynesia*.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

The Pacific islands and atolls are ecologically vulnerable. By following these guidelines while diving, you can help preserve the ecology and beauty of the reefs:

- Encourage dive operators in their efforts to establish permanent moorings at appropriate dive sites.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control.
- Avoid touching living marine organisms with your body and equipment.
- Take great care in underwater caves, as your air bubbles can damage fragile organisms.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals.
- Take home all your trash and any litter you may find as well.
- Never stand on corals, even if they look solid and robust.

days local dive shops tend to use the sites located on the south side of Rarotonga, where you'll enjoy some good dives in the passages and along the sloping reef. Rarotonga also has three wrecks that are regularly dived. It's possible to dive off Aitutaki as well.

Easter Island

Yes, there's diving in Easter Island! It's unhyped and that's why we love it so much. It's still a secret, word-of-mouth diving destination that savvy divers will add to their itinerary. But don't look for throngs of pelagics (species that usually live in open oceans rather than waters adjacent to land or reefs) or psychedelic corals – they are rare. What's the pull, then? In a word: visibility. The lack of pollution, runoff, particles and plankton guarantees maximum water clarity – 40m is the norm, but it can reach a phenomenal 60m. Another highlight is the dramatic seascape, with numerous breathtaking drop-offs, chasms, caverns, arches and overhangs, giving the sites a peculiarly sculpted look and an eerie atmosphere.

Most sites are scattered along the western and northern coasts, with Motu Nui as a prime diving and snorkelling spot. If you're seasick, take note: since the Easter Island waters are devoid of any protective barrier reef, be prepared to cope with sometimes difficult conditions to get to the sites.

Fiji

Fiji has achieved cult status among diving connoisseurs, and justifiably so. Where else in the world can you join a hair-raising shark feed, then drift with the currents along walls festooned with colourful soft corals, all in the same area?

If you're after the thrill of a lifetime, we suggest you register for a shark-feeding session in Beqa lagoon, off Viti Levu. Here you're certain to go nose-to-nose with dozens of sharks – a fantastic adrenaline rush (aargh!). Up to eight types of shark take part in the handfeeding, including ponderous-looking bull sharks and even the heavyweight of them all – tiger sharks! The feeders distribute about 250kg of dead fish during each dive, which gives you an idea of the orgy. Fear not – these dives are conducted in a very professional way by experienced guides who know their job. The two feeders have been handfeeding the sharks for more than six years and they really know their behaviour.

In the mood for less challenging sites? Head to the north shore of Viti Levu, off Nananu-i-Ra island. This area is a good balance of scenic seascapes, elaborate reef systems and dense marine life. Dream Maker and Breath Taker rank among the best sites in this area, featuring large pristine clumps of corals surrounded by neon-coloured fish.

Taveuni has gained international recognition in the diving community. The Somosomo Strait, a narrow stretch of ocean that is funnelled between Taveuni and Vanua Levu, is truly world class, with exhilarating drift dives in nutrient-filled waters and steep drop-offs mantled with phenomenal soft corals. Purple Wall, Great White Wall, Rainbow Passage and Annie's Bommies are the perennial faves in this area.

Kadavu's highlight is Great Astrolabe Reef, a 100km-long barrier reef that hugs the southern and eastern coasts of the island. This gem of a reef acts as a magnet for countless species. The seascape is a mind-boggling combination of canyons, crevices and arches. The best dive spots include Broken Stone, Split Rock and Naiqoro Passage.

Diving in the Mamanucas is probably less spectacular, but it's still very rewarding, especially for novice divers. Prominent sites include the

Easter Island claims the best visibility of all Pacific dive sites, boasting up to an incredible 60m.

Fiji has rightly been dubbed 'the soft-coral capital of the world'.

Supermarket and Gotham City, but we found them a bit overhyped – it's better to ask about lesser-known sites.

If you have the chance to embark on a live-aboard, you'll probably dive the Bligh Water area and the Lomaiviti Group. Here you'll feel like a National Geographic photographer exploring uncharted territory. Two seamounts rising from the abyss to just below the surface include E6 and Mt Mutiny – both act as magnets for a wide assortment of pelagics and reef species. Off Gau island, Nigali Passage is an adrenaline-packed drift dive.

French Polynesia

Wow! French Polynesia is sure to elicit strong emotions – underwater as well as on land. Consistently billed as one of the world's great diving destinations, the islands provide enthralling diving for the experienced and novices alike. Its great success as a diving Mecca can be attributed to the unbeatable repertoire of diving adventures it offers. From Tahiti in the Society Islands to Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas and Rangiroa in the Tuamotus, the options are countless.

You could start your diving trip in Mo'orea. The Tiki and Opunohu Canyons host regular shark-feeding sessions, so you're guaranteed to see blacktip, grey and lemon sharks. In Bora Bora, Tapu, Muri Muri and Tupitipiti never fail to impress, with frequent sightings of grey reef and blacktip sharks and eagle rays, and nicely shaped sloping reefs. From Bora Bora you could journey on to the Tuamotus for the thrill of a lifetime – base yourself in Rangiroa and dive Tiputa Pass. The stuff of legend, this magical site is usually done as a drift dive. Divers descend at the edge of the drop-off and let themselves be sucked into the lagoon through the pass with the incoming current, amid a swirl of grey sharks and reef species. Fakarava shares similar characteristics. Garuae Pass and Tumakohua Pass are high-voltage drift dives that will leave you awestruck.

Adventurous divers will be sure to visit the Marquesas, which open up a whole new world of diving. The main highlight is the dramatic seascape, with a wealth of drop-offs, caverns, arches and ledges, giving the sites an eerie atmosphere. Since the Marquesas are devoid of any protective barrier reefs, the water is thick with plankton and visibility doesn't exceed 10m to 15m. Nuku Hiva's iconic dive is with pygmy orcas, a bewildering dolphin gathering that will enthrall even the most jaded divers. Tikapo is an offshore seamount that consistently sizzles with electric fish action.

SCUBA SENSATIONS FOR EVERYONE

The dive menu is so eclectic in the South Pacific and in Micronesia that it's hard for divers to decide where to go. Here is a brief summary of the types of dives on offer to help you select your slice of underwater heaven.

Wreck diving Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Guam, Chuuk Lagoon, Marshall Islands, Palau

Wall diving Yap, Pohnpei, Kosrae, French Polynesia, Palau

Drift diving French Polynesia, Fiji, Palau, New Caledonia, Marshall Islands

Muck diving Solomon Islands

Cave diving Niue, Tonga, Palau

Crystal-clear diving Niue, Easter Island, Tonga

Shark diving French Polynesia, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands

Manta diving French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Guam, Yap

Soft corals Fiji

Beginners all places!

The rundown in this chapter is by no means exhaustive. For more information, see Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkeling Fiji*, *Diving & Snorkeling Tahiti & French Polynesia*, *Diving & Snorkeling Guam & Yap* and *Diving & Snorkeling Chuuk Lagoon, Pohnpei & Kosrae*.

Two good resources on diving in French Polynesia are www.polynesia-diving.com and www.diving-tahiti.com.

TO FEED OR NOT TO FEED?

Shark feeding is popular in some parts of the South Pacific, especially in French Polynesia, Fiji and New Caledonia. Whether or not it is a good idea is open to debate. On the one hand, these artificial encounters undeniably disrupt natural behaviour patterns. On the other hand, the experience is undoubtedly spectacular and such dives have been conducted without any accidents so far. Some experts think that these shows can have educational virtues and are a good way to raise awareness among divers. If you're against shark feeding, don't hesitate to ask for a 'regular' dive.

Another stunner, Matateteiko features a similar topography, with an underwater platform jutting out to the open ocean.

Diving off Hiva Oa is a recent affair – the first commercial dive outfit started in late 2005. Most dive sites are located off Motu Anakee in Atuona Bay and at the southwestern tip of the bay.

New Caledonia

New Caledonia's main claim to fame is its lagoon – supposedly one of the largest in the world. Off Nouméa, an excellent site well worth bookmarking is Passe de Boulari. Coral is not the strong point of the dive, but for fish action it's unbeatable. If you want to see sharks, this is the place! Another exciting pass is Passe de Dumbéa, which plays home to schools of groupers from October to December. If you make it to Poum, don't miss Grand Récif de Poum, at the country's northwestern tip – this must be the wildest dive area in New Caledonia. Be prepared for enthralling drift dives accompanied by a procession of predators. In Hienghène, you can't but be impressed by Tidwan, Cathédrale and Récif de Kaun, all boasting an outstanding topography comprising canyons, chasms and fissures, plus prolific marine life.

The area off Poindimié is more renowned for reef life, soft corals and nudibranches. Most dive sites are located in Grande Passe de Payes and in Passe de la Fourmi.

Île des Pins features some stunning sites. Vallée des Gorgones, off Gadji's reef, is a killer, with an excellent drop-off adorned with a profusion of graceful sea fans and a dense array of reef fish. Récif de Kasmira is another superb site, featuring a coral mound ranging from 3m to 17m. If you're after something unusual, try Grotte de la Troisième (Cave of the Third). About 8km north of Kuto, it features an inland cave filled with crystal-clear fresh water. You'll navigate inside the cave, at about 6m, wending your way among stalactites and stalagmites. Beware of silt build-up, though.

We're also suckers for the sites in the Loyalty Islands. Lifou's signature dives are Gorgones Reef and Shoji Reef, with delicate sea fans wafting in the current as the main attraction. Keep your eyes peeled for pelagic sightings, including tuna, sharks, rays and barracudas. Ouvéa offers pristine sites south of the atoll.

Niue

Tiny Niue cannot really compete with its neighbouring heavyweights, but it boasts excellent diving nonetheless. No streams, no runoff, no pollution and no fringing reef equal gin-clear visibility (up to 50m). Apart from this, the main highlight is the dramatic seascape. The coral flats surrounding the island are honeycombed with caves, gullies and chasms. If you enjoy diving in atmospheric caverns, you'll love Ana Mahaga (Twin

The lagoon in New Caledonia is so large that getting to most sites on the barrier reef involves a boat trip – some journeys last as long as 45 minutes. On the plus side, most sites are uncrowded.

Niue offers great visibility (up to 50m), an underwater labyrinth of caves and chasms, and if you're brave, swarms of sea snakes.

Caves), a humungous coral structure riddled with swimthroughs, tunnels and arches. There are also a couple of great sites off Tamakautoga Reef. The Dome is another great cave system that extends about 30m back under the island. Egypt is almost as atmospheric – you'll meander among boulders in narrow channels bounded by high walls. Niue's iconic dive is Snake Gully, where divers are rewarded with the very unusual vision of dozens of sea snakes – some winding along the bottom, some seemingly knotted up together.

Niue's weak point is the lack of healthy coral. A cyclone in 2004 battered most coral structures, and they will take time to regenerate. Marine life is also poor in comparison with other South Pacific destinations, due to the lack of nutrients. Don't expect swarms of fish – it's the scenery that makes the dives so rewarding. And if you need some action, be here from June to October, when humpback whales frolic off the coast!

Samoa

Samoa is certainly not a hardcore diver's destination, but that doesn't mean you should give it a wide berth. Off Savai'i, Tialipi's Heaven features a pleasant architecture – wend your way around pinnacles, swimthroughs and canyons in less than 25m. If you need to refresh your skills, Lelepa Bay is ideal, with countless juvenile fish in the shallows. At Coral Gardens, you can weave around the coral structures and marvel at the colourful fauna fluttering about. You might also want to explore the *Junco*, a three-mast vessel that sank in 1881 in 25m of water. It's nothing spectacular, but it's scenic and it makes for a welcome change.

Off 'Upolu, you'll probably dive Anganoa Wall on the south coast, as well as Eagle Ray Gully. It's easy and comfortable.

Solomon Islands

It's impossible to get bored in the Solomons. The variety of sites is staggering, as are the quality of the diving and the sense of exploration. If you want to feel like a pioneer, you came to the right place!

You can start your diving trip at Tulagi in the Central Province. The local dive centre recommends Twin Tunnels, a massive coral mound chiselled by two tunnels, with abundant fish life; Manta Passage, a drift dive famous for its regular manta sightings; Presentation Point, an underwater maze with plenty of canyons; Sandfly Passage, an exhilarating wall drift dive; and Christmas Tree Rock. Keep your eyes peeled for pelagics, especially mantas and sharks. If you need a break from offshore reef dives, several spectacular shipwrecks will keep you entertained, including the USS *Kanawha*, a 150m-long vessel, and the USS *Aaron Ward*, a US Navy destroyer. Unfortunately, they lie deep and are accessible to seasoned divers only.

Having whetted your appetite, you could journey on to New Georgia in Western Province. Savvy divers rave about the sites in Marovo Lagoon – Uepi Point, Bottom of the Channel, North Log, Divers Bay, The Elbow

Samoa dive sites don't disappoint if they are taken for what they are: relaxed and easy.

The Solomons are still synonymous with adventure, seclusion and mystery.

DIVING & FLYING

Most divers to the South Pacific and Micronesia get there by plane. While it's fine to dive soon after flying, it's important to remember that your last dive should be completed at least 12 hours (some experts advise 24 hours) before your flight, to minimise the risk of residual nitrogen in the blood that can cause decompression injury. Careful attention to flight times is necessary in this region because so much of the inter-island transportation is by air.

DO YOU 'MUCK DIVE'?

Growing weary of sharks, manta rays and all the big stuff? Well, it's time to 'muck dive'. Don't feel offended – this simply means that you concentrate on tiny, small and unusual critters, such as ghost pipefish, pygmy seahorses, manta shrimps, nudibranchs, flatworms and sand-dwelling species. The Solomons are a good place to get an education in this domain. All you need is a keen eye!

and Point to Point, to name a few. Expect steep walls, prolific invertebrate life and dramatic seascapes.

Another hotspot is Ghizo Island, further west. Here again the diving is superlative, with a stunning mix of WWII wrecks, superb offshore reefs ablaze with marine life, and plummeting walls. Wreck buffs will make a beeline for the *Toa Maru*, a virtually intact Japanese freighter that ran aground during WWII. It's huge – almost 140m long – and lies on its starboard side at a depth ranging from 7m to 37m. Divers can explore the ship's holds, which contain tanks, ammunition, a motorbike and sake bottles. In all, it's a 'mini *Coolidge*' (see below). If you're looking for fish action, Grand Central Station will appeal to you. The location says it all: it's at the northwestern tip of Ghizo, where oceanic currents merge. It's a perfect spot to watch rays, sharks, barracudas and other predators. The Beach Dive, The Gap and One Tree Island are also classic log entries.

Tonga

Whale-watching is so popular in Tonga that it has stolen the show. While Tongan waters will never be mistaken for those of, say, French Polynesia or Palau, there's some excellent diving off Ha'apai and Vava'u. The reefs are peppered with numerous caves that make for atmospheric playgrounds and eerie ambience. In some places, you'll feel as though you're swimming in an underwater cathedral. Off Ha'apai, some sites well worth logging include The Arch, Foa Caves, Hot Spring Cave or Ha'ano Castle. Off Vava'u, it's more or less the same story below the waterline. Swallows Cave is a must-see, as are Shark Tooth and Hunga Magic. The wreck of the *Clan MacWilliam* adds a touch of variety.

Vanuatu

A few finstrokes from the shore, the legendary USS *President Coolidge* is trumpeted as the best wreck dive in the world – we agree. The sheer proportions of this behemoth are overwhelming: resting on its side in 20m to 67m of water off Luganville (Santo), the *Coolidge* is 200m long and 25m wide. It's shrouded with a palpable aura, and much has been written about its history. Amazingly, more than 50 years after its demise it's still in very good shape. It's not heavily overgrown with marine life, but you will see numerous fittings and artefacts, including weaponry, gas masks, trenching tools, trucks, rows of toilets, a porcelain statue (the 'Lady'), a pool, personal belongings abandoned by 5000 soldiers, and all the fixtures of a luxury cruise liner. A minimum of five dives is recommended to get a glimpse of the whole vessel. Although nearly all dives on the *Coolidge* are deep (more than 30m), she is suitable for novice divers. You'll start at shallower depths (about 25m) and go progressively deeper as you become more familiar with the diving.

The only downside is that the *Coolidge* has overshadowed other dive sites in Vanuatu. In Santo, other wrecks worthy of exploration include the *Tui Tewate* and the USS *Tucker*.

Tonga's best selling point is its contoured underwater terrain.

The USS *President Coolidge* was a luxury cruise liner converted to a troop carrier during WWII. In 1942, while entering what the captain thought were safe waters in Vanuatu's Espiritu Santo harbour, the ship struck two mines and sank very close to the shore. Visit <http://www.michaelmcfadyenscuba.info/articles/coolmain.htm> for details on the history of the *Coolidge*.

If you need a break from wreck dives, don't miss the opportunity to sample some truly excellent reef dives off Santo. Cindy's Reef is a perennial favourite, as is Tutuba Point, but we found Million Dollar Point much more eye-catching. Thousands of tonnes of military paraphernalia were discarded here by the US Navy when they left the country. Divers swim among the tangle of cranes, bulldozers, trucks and other construction hardware in less than 30m and finish their dive exploring a small shipwreck in the shallows.

And what about the diving in Efate? It can't really compete with Santo, but we found Hat Island, about 5km off the north side of Efate, as well as Paul's Rock, also off the north side of Efate, pretty appealing. The seascape is top notch, and you'll see a smorgasbord of reef fish.

DIVE SITES IN MICRONESIA

Federated States of Micronesia

CHUUK LAGOON

Chuuk Lagoon is an absolute must for wreck enthusiasts. Picture this: several dozen WWII Japanese ships of varying shapes and sizes lying in the lagoon. The wrecks were discovered by the diving world in the late 1970s and make for a fantastic collection of vibrant artificial reefs within easy reach. Each section of the wreck is like a miniature version of a full-blown reef, from pelagic predators to tropical fish to thriving coral. An added bonus is the historic aura that emanates from this phenomenal underwater graveyard – most ships contain various artefacts and war relics.

It's hard to decide which wrecks to choose. On the photogenic scale, the *Shinkoku Maru* scores high, as do the *Yamagiri Maru*, the I-169 submarine, the *San Francisco Maru* and the *Fujikawa Maru*. The *Shinkoku Maru* (maximum depth 40m) is a stunner, with artefacts, excellent fish life and lush coral growth, while the *San Francisco Maru* (maximum depth 58m) also has its fair share of devotees in spite of its depth. Tanks rest on the main deck at the forward part of the ship. The *Fujikawa* (maximum depth 34m), affectionately dubbed 'The Fuji', sits upright. It's fairly shallow and has loads of corals and artefacts, and penetration is easy.

The only drawback in Chuuk is the depth. Most wrecks are deep dives, in the 30m to 40m range.

KOSRAE

Although less charismatic than Chuuk, Kosrae boasts its fair share of underwater wonders and deserves attention for its number of relaxed, easy sites. The island is surrounded by a magnificent reef chock full of technicolour species. Be sure to check out Shark Island, a high-voltage drift dive where sightings of pelagics are common; Blue Hole, a perennial fave, famous for its concentration of colourful reef species; Walung Drop-Off, a steep wall punctuated by exuberant hard corals; and Yela Wall, a deeper dive (maximum depth 37m), for seasoned divers only.

POHNPEI

If you want relaxed diving, Pohnpei will appeal to you. Novice divers in particular will feel comfortable – the dive conditions are less challenging than anywhere else but still offer excellent fish action. A longstanding favourite, Areu Wall is an inner-lagoon dive north of Areu Point. It features an excellent mix of invertebrates, small fish, large corals and sea fans. Mwand Wall and Pass is also a beautiful site. You'll enjoy weaving your way among large coral heads lavishly blanketed in a bright mosaic of sea fans. To the south, Rainbow Island (Nahlap Island) is renowned for its pelagic sightings – expect close encounters with jacks, sharks, turtles

and schools of surgeonfish. At Poahloang Pass, strong tidal currents push the deep water back and forth through the passage, providing nutrients for corals that form a vivid tapestry on the reefs. The wall at Black Coral Island is liberally draped with sea fans, sponge formations and colourful soft corals. Tuna, barracuda, jacks and sharks can occasionally be seen cruising by.

In the mood for a high-voltage drift dive? Ask for Palikir Pass. Gliding with the current, you'll be captivated by the prolific fish life, including grey sharks, schools of jacks, barracuda and Napoleon wrasse, among others.

The nearby atolls of Ant and Pakin are still largely untouched and offer pristine dive sites.

YAP

Manta, manta, manta. Consistently hailed as the best manta destination in the world, Yap features truly world-class sites where divers can just about be assured of seeing mantas. The best area to spot them is the long and winding Miil Channel, to the northwest of the island. It's home to large concentrations of manta rays visiting the many cleaning stations where small fish come out of the coral heads to scour the mantas of parasites – a unique sight. Yap's signature dives include the aptly named Manta Ridge, Manta Ray Bay, Valley of the Rays and Miil Point, all less than 25m.

Although the manta experience is the true clincher, there's much more to diving in Yap than just these graceful giants. You'll find superb reef and wall dives off the southern tip of the island. Recommended ones include Eagle's Nest, an easy drift dive along the barrier reef where squadrons of eagle rays are regularly spotted, and Yap Caverns, the most atmospheric part of the Gilman Tip. Here you can see white-tip and grey reef sharks lazing about near overhangs and along sandy slopes, and explore the well-lit tunnels carved in the caverns. If you want sheer wall diving, Gilman Wall is hard to rival. Magic Kingdom says it all: here you can expect a fantasyland of textures and shapes in less than 25m.

Guam

So, you want variety? You came to the right place. Sure, nothing is really world-class, but Guam offers a wide range of diving experiences, from wall diving to drift dives to wreck dives. For sensations and photogeny, the Blue Hole is hard to beat. Picture this: a perpendicular shaft in the reef extends down to about 40m, but at 38m a large window opens to the outer wall, allowing the diver to exit and ascend a free fall through the shaft. The Crevice is another must-see, with the occasional appearance of pelagics. Coral Gardens is a relaxing dive, with various coral mounds and their accompanying sea life. Another stunner is Pete's Reef, which presents a nice mix of small caves, coral heads and sandy patches, all endowed with a variety of marine life.

Guam also boasts a number of diveable shipwrecks and airplanes in Apra Harbour. Try the highly-rated *Tokai Maru*, a Japanese freighter sunk by a submarine torpedo attack during WWII (maximum depth 38m), or the nearby SMS *Cormoran*, which was scuttled during WWI.

For more information on these dive sites, see p231.

Marshall Islands

The strong point of this archipelago is the sheer variety of attractions, including a collection of WWII plane wrecks, breathtaking walls, a varied topography, exuberant coral gardens and countless fish species, including pelagics.

Manta rays commonly range in size from 2m to 4m. They are harmless filter feeders, eating mainly plankton. They have tails, but no barb as stingrays do.

Penetration of wrecks is a skilled speciality and should not be attempted without proper training.

TAKE THE PLUNGE!

The South Pacific and Micronesia both provide ideal and safe conditions for beginners, with their warm, crystalline waters and prolific marine life. Arrange an introductory dive with a dive centre to give you a feel for what it's like to swim underwater. It will begin on dry land, where the instructor will run through basic safety procedures and show you the equipment.

The dive itself takes place in a safe location and lasts between 20 and 40 minutes under the guidance of the instructor.

You'll practise breathing with the regulator above the surface before going underwater. Then the instructor will hold your hand if need be and guide your movements at a depth of between 3m and 10m. Some centres start the instruction in waist-high water in a hotel swimming pool or on the beach.

There is no formal procedure, but you shouldn't dive if you have a medical condition such as acute ear, nose and throat problems, epilepsy or heart disease (such as infarction), if you have a cold or sinusitis, or if you are pregnant.

If you enjoy your introductory dive, you might want to follow a four- to five-day course to get first-level certification. This will allow you to dive anywhere in the world – it's like a driving licence. The South Pacific is an excellent area in which to do the certification course.

Dive sites around Majuro include Aneko Island, with loads of coral pinnacles, Calalin Pass, a longstanding fave for drift dives, Calalin Island, adjacent to the pass, Second Island, Fourth Island and Bokolap Island, all of them blessed with healthy reefs and copious fish life. For shark encounters, Shark Street is hard to rival – divers have reported sightings of more than 20 toothy critters here.

Fancy wreck diving? Check out the dozen or so WWII plane wrecks around the island. Most divers swear by the *Kabilok*, a sunken freighter that rests on a sandy floor in Majuro lagoon, the *Grumman Duck*, a bi-winged aircraft in good shape, and the B-24 *Liberator*, an American bomber. Not only are they steeped in history, but they are also overgrown with marine life. More recent wrecks include *Cenpac*, a former inter-island ship, and *Ratak-Ralik*, a freighter sunk in the late 1980s.

And for those who really want to get away from it all, Arno Atoll is a treat. Absolutely no crowds and very few dive boats – it's still virtually pristine and pelagic sightings are almost guaranteed.

Palau

Feeling somewhat blasé? Palau is the perfect place to rekindle your passion. Dive Jellyfish Lake, and you'll know what we mean. This must be one of the most unusual sites on Planet Scuba. Where else in the world can you dive (snorkel, actually) in a marine lake chock full of nonstinging jellyfish? Diving down into this layer of gelatinous animals made translucent by the sunlight is an ethereal (some would say sensual) sensation.

Another iconic calling card in Palau is wall diving. Peleliu Wall, Ngemelis Wall (Big Drop-Off) and West Ngemelis Wall (New Drop-Off) are world renowned, and for good reason. They combine the thrills of diving steep walls – it's a bit like sky-diving – with heart-pounding drift dives in the current. To top it all off, these sites consistently sizzle with electric fish action. You're likely to encounter sharks in great numbers, manta rays, groupers, sea fans, soft corals and just about every form of marine life you can imagine. Anything can happen at these sites.

If you have a hankering for wrecks, Palau is also a choice destination. Off Koror, the *Chuyo Maru* (maximum depth 36m), the Helmet Wreck (maximum depth 29m) and the *Iro Maru* (maximum depth 36m) will

Palau is the only place in the South Pacific where saltwater crocodiles can be found. Fear not: it's rare for divers to encounter them.

keep wreck buffs entertained. These easily accessible vessels are heavily overgrown with corals and replete with fish life.

Palau's varied underwater terrain offers a couple of opportunities to sample something different. Want to weave your way amid giant stalactites? Ask for Chandelier Cave, off Koror. Feel like exploring a mysterious cavern, ablaze with marine life? Siaes Tunnel, west of Ulong, is for you. In the mood for an otherworldly experience? Dive the Blue Holes, which comprise four vertical shafts that open on top of the reef flat. Sunbeams play through openings in the reef system – a magical sight.

DIVE CENTRES

In most cases, the standards of diving facilities are high in the South Pacific and in Micronesia. You'll find professional and reliable dive centres staffed with qualified instructors catering to divers of all levels. The majority of dive centres are affiliated with an internationally recognised diving organisation – eg PADI, SSI, NAUI and CMAS. They are mostly hotel based, but they welcome walk-in guests. The staff members usually speak English.

Centres are open year round, most of them every day, but it's best to reserve your dive a day in advance. Depending on the area, centres typically offer two-tank dives (usually in the morning) or single dives (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). Many sites are offshore and involve a boat ride.

Be aware that, even if common standards apply, each dive centre has its own personality and style. It's a good idea to visit the place first to get the feel of the operation.

Diving in the South Pacific or Micronesia is expensive in comparison with most destinations in Asia, the Caribbean or the Red Sea. Set dive packages (eg five or 10 dives) are usually cheaper. All types of courses are available. Gear hire may or may not be included in the price of the dive, so it's not a bad idea to bring your own equipment if you plan to dive a lot.

See Dive Shops in the Activities sections of the individual country chapters for details of operators in those countries.

Required Documents

If you're a certified diver, don't forget to bring your C-card and logbook with you. Dive centres welcome divers regardless of their training background, provided they can produce a certificate from an internationally recognised agency.

HOW MUCH?

Two-tank dive: US\$100
(without gear), US\$120
(gear included)

Introductory dive: about
US\$95

Open-water certification:
about US\$450

Food & Drink

The food of the South Pacific is as sturdy, jovial and inviting as the people who cook it. It's fulfilling comfort fare, so don't worry about consuming thousands of extra calories or piling your plate too high – the more you eat, the more the islanders will love you for it. One of the most important priorities in life on these warm, convivial islands is that there is enough food for all to sit down and enjoy a nourishing meal in good company.

While staples were once dictated by what the ancient navigating peoples brought in their canoes, each island nation now has a distinctive culinary style, influenced by French, English and US colonisation and the presence of Chinese and Indian labourers. Root tubers, fish and pork now share a plate with pasta, rice and a smorgasbord of canned foods from corned beef to foie gras. Although visitors to the South Pacific will find traditional food less available, they will encounter a delicious mingling of cultures.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Starch, meat and fish make up the bulk of the Pacific diet. Vegetables have never played much of a part in traditional cuisines, although foreign influences have added some colourful touches incorporating a wider variety of ingredients.

Breadfruit

Breadfruit is typically eaten unripe and roasted till charred on an open fire; the flavour of the steaming starchy flesh is somewhere between a potato and a chestnut. It can also be fried into chips, boiled or baked in the oven. The addition of coconut cream kneaded into the cooked flesh makes a sweet, doughy paste that can be eaten as is or wrapped in leaves and baked to create a starchy pudding.

Many traditional cultures fermented breadfruit, both as a preservation technique and to add flavour to an otherwise bland diet (it has a strong, sour taste). There have been stories of century-old fermented breadfruit being still edible. Fermented breadfruit is prepared less and less in the region, but dried breadfruit continues to be consumed in places such as Samoa and the Solomon Islands. It can be eaten as chips, ground into meal or mixed with water or coconut milk to make a porridge.

Taro

There are several varieties of taro, all producing an oblong root tuber that is boiled in water or steamed in a traditional earthen pit oven. It's a firm, starchy, potato-like food that has a slightly gooey exterior when cooked just right. Covered with coconut milk it exudes a hearty, gotta-be-good-for-you quality and makes a satisfying accompaniment to a meal.

Although hypotheses abound, no-one knows for certain how *kumara* (sweet potato) arrived from South America to the Pacific islands.

The Breadfruit Institute's very informative website (<http://breadfruit.ntbg.org>) was created to promote the study and use of breadfruit for food and reforestation.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Pacific cuisines have been heavily influenced by other cultures and nowadays you won't find too many traditional dishes on the menu. Here are a few modern specialities that are found throughout the Pacific:

Sashimi Japanese-style raw fish, thinly sliced and served with rice and a sauce.

Raw fish in coconut milk Thin chunks of fish marinated in lemon juice, tossed in with veggies and spices (changes regionally) and doused in coconut milk.

The leaves of certain species of taro can also be eaten, usually mixed in savoury stews or eaten with coconut milk. They resemble spinach when cooked, and are the only traditional leafy green in Polynesia.

Coconut

Nothing invokes the flavours of the South Pacific more than the versatile coconut. It's an all-in-one food: meat, sugar, oil and water, all conveniently presented in its own bowl and cup. Each of the nut's four growth stages provides a different form of food or drink. The first stage is ideal for drinking because there's no flesh inside, except for a tasty jelly-like substance. The best eating stage is the second, when the flesh inside is firm but thin and succulent. After this, the flesh becomes thick and hard – ideal for drying into copra. At its fourth stage the milk inside goes spongy, making what is sometimes known as 'coconut ice cream'.

Fruit

While the Polynesian islands are generally dripping in fresh fruit (think mangoes, papayas, giant grapefruit and the world's sweetest bananas), Micronesia and some parts of Melanesia are less well endowed. Most locals source fruit from their own trees or from family and friends, so it can sometimes be surprisingly hard to buy local fruit throughout the Pacific. When possible, the best and cheapest places to buy it is at markets and roadside stalls.

Meat & Fish

Fresh fish and shellfish are found on nearly every restaurant menu and, as a rule, are fabulous. Surprisingly, pigs were traditionally more highly valued than seafood, and the preparation of pork played a key role in celebrations and events. Dog was once widely eaten but it's now a rare occurrence.

Regional meats include flying foxes (fruit bats) in eastern Polynesia and Melanesia, venison in New Caledonia and goat in the Marquesas Islands. High-quality lamb and beef imported from New Zealand (NZ) is often available, as are low-quality frozen chicken legs from the US.

Canned Influences

Ever-popular canned meat is cheap, easy and tasty; unfortunately, it's also full of fat, nitrites and empty calories. The effect of this and other imports such as soft drinks, canned fish and fast food on the weight and health of native Pacific peoples is devastating. Heart problems, hypertension and diabetes are rife throughout the region.

DRINKS

Nothing is better on a hot Pacific day than an ice-cold coconut. It's slightly sweet, chock-full of electrolytes and comes in the world's best, most ecological cup: its own husk. Fresh juices can be difficult to find, and you'll often have to choose a bottle or can of juice that has been imported from somewhere far less appealing. If you can't find a coconut, your best choice for healthy rehydration is bottled water – stay away from the tap water unless you've been assured by a reliable source that it's OK (see p852).

Coffee is found everywhere, but the further you get from the major towns, the more likely it will be instant coffee.

Kava (see the boxed text, p82) is the most important drink on many Pacific islands, both for ceremonial and mind-calming reasons.

A Taste of the Pacific by Susan Parkinson, Peggy Stacy and Adrian Mattison is a culinary guide to the region and includes 200 island-inspired recipes.

Coconut-lovers should head to www.coconut.com, a website devoted to the nut and everywhere it grows. You'll find recipes, nutritional information, a vast amount of article links, blogs and more.

A single coconut has about as much protein as one-eighth of a kilogram of beef.

WE DARE YOU!

If you've got the guts, give these regional favourites a try:

Fafaru (French Polynesia) Raw fish marinated in rotting fish-infused seawater; it smells like roadkill but the texture is divine.

Palolo worm (Vanuatu) Collected from coral reefs, *palolo* looks like green caviar and is served on toast.

Sea (sea slug innards – Samoa) This incredibly salty, oyster-like delicacy leaves a metallic aftertaste.

Alcoholic Drinks

Attitudes to alcohol vary across the region. Having witnessed the detrimental effects of alcohol, such as domestic violence, some communities have banned alcohol completely, but in most countries it's freely available. Those nations with their own breweries – such as Tahiti (Hinano Beer), Tonga (Ikale Beer) and Samoa (Vailima Beer) – brew excellent beers, and Australian, NZ and US beers are also widely available. There aren't too many happening bars or nightspots on most islands, but at swank hotels and resorts you'll find all the tropical, coconut and pineapple cocktails you could dream of imbibing. The French colonies offer a surprising selection of fine French wines.

French Polynesia ranks fifth in the world for the quantity of beer consumed per capita.

CELEBRATIONS

Throughout the Pacific a party often means that delicious food will be prepared in an *umu* (*ahima'a* in French Polynesia, *lovo* in Fiji), a traditional earthen oven. Every island has its own method of preparing the feast, but the common theme is that a variety of food, ranging from meat and fish to taro and cabbage, is neatly wrapped in leaves or a wet cloth and cooked in a stone-lined, wood-fired pit covered with earth. The flavours and juices mingle for several hours and the resulting meal is steamy, tender and delectable.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

In most cases Pacific islanders do not have the ready cash to patronise restaurants, so eating establishments mostly serve the tourist or expat population and are concentrated in highly touristed areas. Bars are more the exception than the rule, although some restaurants double as watering holes.

Restaurants in the French territories can be superb, but they are very expensive. In Fiji there are sumptuous, reasonably priced Indian restaurants and most islands have at least a handful of Western and Chinese places.

Opening hours vary from country to country, but in general restaurants are open for lunch from around 11.30am to 2pm or 3pm, and dinner is served from 6.30pm to around 9pm. In restaurants that are also drink-spots, the dinner hours might extend until 2am or later.

There is inevitably some form of shopping outlet in all but the smallest of villages. Depending on the level of isolation, the choice may be limited and the goods expensive. Markets are the source of the freshest and cheapest foodstuffs, while shops may rely on canned goods.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Fish, pork and chicken form the basis of most Pacific dishes so vegetarians will have to either pick through their food or get creative with self-catering. The exception to this is Fiji, which has a large Indian population and great vegetarian options.

Kava, the Pacific Elixir by Vincent Lebot, Mark Merlin and Lamont Lindstrom is an exhaustive study of the South Pacific beverage from a New Age perspective.

KAVA

The drinking of kava remains a strong social tradition in many Pacific cultures, and is practised throughout almost all of Polynesia and much of Melanesia. As well as a form of welcome, it's used to seal alliances, start chiefly conferences and to commemorate births, deaths and marriages. To decline kava when it is offered is to decline friendship – so even though it may taste disgusting to you, you've got to gulp it down and appear impressed.

In many countries kava has helped retain ancient customs. Many people attribute a low crime rate to the calming, sedative effects of the drink, which, unlike alcohol, does not produce aggressive behaviour.

Ceremony

In more traditional areas, kava root is prepared by chewing it into a mush and spitting the hard bits onto leaves. Water is added to the mush, then it's all filtered through coconut fibres. This method produces a more potent brew, as saliva triggers the root's active ingredients. Modern techniques involve pounding the kava root in a bucket, and it can even be prepared from a commercially produced powder.

Kava is served in a coconut-shell cup and usually the chief and honoured guests drink first. Some cultures expect drinkers to down the kava in a single gulp, any remaining liquid being poured on the ground. Sometimes kava is drunk in silence, but some cultures prefer a great deal of slurping to show appreciation. Sometimes your companions will clap while you drink, but other noises and conversation are generally kept to a minimum.

In some areas, particularly the more touristy ones where customs have become more lenient, both men and women drink kava. In most places, though, it is an exclusively male activity – some say the original kava plant sprang from the loins of a woman, hence the *tapu* (taboo).

Kava makes the drinker's eyes sensitive to glare, so any strong lights, especially flashbulbs, are very intrusive.

Experiential Effects

Kava has a pungent, muddy taste and you'll begin to feel its effects within 10 to 25 minutes. If it's a strong brew, it'll make your lips go numb and cold like you've had a Novocain injection, then your limbs will get heavy and your speech will slow. If it's really strong, you might get double vision and want to go to sleep. Even from the mildest form of the drink, you will feel slightly sedated and have a general sense of wellbeing. Some islanders claim to have repeated religious experiences after drinking kava.

Medicinal Uses

Broken down, kava is a cocktail of up to 14 analgesics and anaesthetics that work as natural pain and appetite suppressants. The root also has antibacterial, relaxant, diuretic and decongestant properties, and has been recommended for cancer, asthma and stomach upsets. Studies showing that kava can combat depression, reduce anxiety and even lower blood pressure led to a short-lived kava boom in Western countries during the 1990s. Another study that claimed the root could potentially cause liver damage (this study was later discredited) resulted in bans and warnings on kava throughout the Western world.

EATING WITH KIDS

Kids can happily munch on fresh fish and fruit, chicken and coconut. Most places in the region have kid-pleaser items such as hamburgers, pastas and rice dishes on their menus, and the local cuisine is often soft enough for most children to be able to try new foods such as taro and breadfruit. Baby supplies are available in all but the most remote places.

Ice cream is frequently available, and it's a real treat in the hot weather.

DOS & DON'TS

- Do make sure you try at least one meal cooked in a traditional earthen oven.
- Do wash your hands before a meal; you might be eating with your fingers.
- Do check regional chapters to find out the tipping protocol of the country you are visiting.
- Don't eat turtle; it's endangered and you'll be promoting illegal business.
- Don't just dig in; the Pacific is very religious and many people say grace before a meal.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Ways of eating in the Pacific islands vary according to the fare: Chinese and Japanese food is eaten with chopsticks; you should use your hands when eating traditional Pacific fare and some Indian specialities; and you can finally pick up a knife and fork for Western food. It's not as confusing as it sounds and, for the most part, no-one will ever complain if you fork through everything.

While many islanders eat copious breakfasts of fish, meat and staples, visitors are more likely to encounter more familiar fare like breads, coffee and sometimes fruit.

Lunch and dinner are often similar to each other, with plenty of fish and meat dishes available.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Easter Island

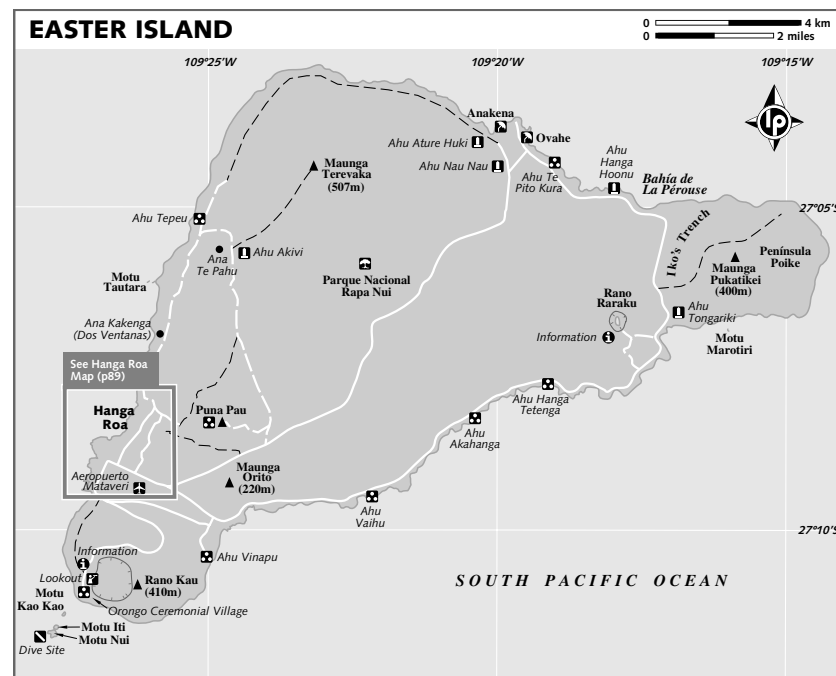
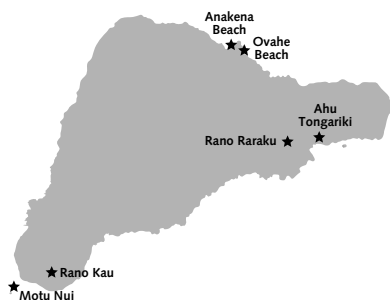
'Wow!' This will probably be your first reaction when arriving in Easter Island, and it's no surprise. Few areas in the world possess a more mystical pull than this tiny speck of land, one of the most isolated places on earth. Endowed with the most logic-defying statues in the world – the strikingly 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.

ARTS

As in Tahiti, traditional dancing is not a mere tourist attraction, but one of the most vibrant forms of expression of traditional Polynesian culture. A couple of talented dance groups perform regularly at various hotels. Tattooing is another aspect of Polynesian culture, and has enjoyed a revival since the late 1980s among the young generation.

If you're into woodcarving, you'll find some elaborate pieces in Hanga Roa.

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language, but the indigenous language is Rapa Nui, an eastern Polynesian dialect closely related to the languages of French Polynesia and Hawai'i. Some people in the tourist business speak English.

EASTER ISLAND BASICS

English	Spanish	Rapa Nui
Hello.	<i>Hola.</i>	<i>'lorana.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>	<i>'lorana.</i>
How are you?	<i>¿Cómo estás?</i>	<i>Pehe koe?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Bien (gracias).</i>	<i>Rivaria.</i>
Please.	<i>Por favor.</i>	
Thanks.	<i>Gracias.</i>	<i>Maururu.</i>
Yes.	<i>Sí.</i>	
No.	<i>No.</i>	

ENVIRONMENT

Geography

Easter Island is roughly triangular in shape, with an extinct volcanic cone in each corner – Maunga (Mt) Terevaka, in the northwest corner, is the highest point at 507m. The island's maximum length is just 24km, and it is only 12km across at its widest point. Much of the interior of Easter Island is grassland, with cultivable soil interspersed with rugged lava fields. Wave erosion has created steep cliffs around much of the coast, and Anakena, on the north shore, is the only broad sandy beach.

Ecology

Deforestation and grazing have seen the loss of nearly all the distinctive local vegetation, and most of the island is now covered in grassland. Parts of the island are being replanted, but mostly with eucalyptus trees.

HANGA ROA

pop 3800

A couple of archaeological sites, a fistful of restaurants, a cute harbour and a languid pace combine to make this one of the most pleasant 'capitals' in the South Seas. It may be a bit unsophisticated and somniferous for some tastes, but fear not, there are enough attractions to keep you entertained for a couple of days. The only settlement on the island, Hanga Roa has all the services you need and is the obvious base for exploration.

ORIENTATION

Most services are on or around Av Atamu Tekena and Av Te Pito o Te Henua, the two main drags. Outside this main area, the irregular dirt roads are rarely marked and street addresses are nonexistent. Fortunately, the place is so small that you'll learn your way around in a day or so.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Isl@net (Av Atamu Tekena s/n; per hr US\$6; ☎ 9.30am–10pm) Next to the main square.

Omotohi Cybercafé (Av Te Pito o Te Henua; per hr US\$6; ☎ 9am–10pm) On the main drag.

Medical Services

Hospital Hanga Roa (☎ 100 215; Av Simón Paoa)

Money

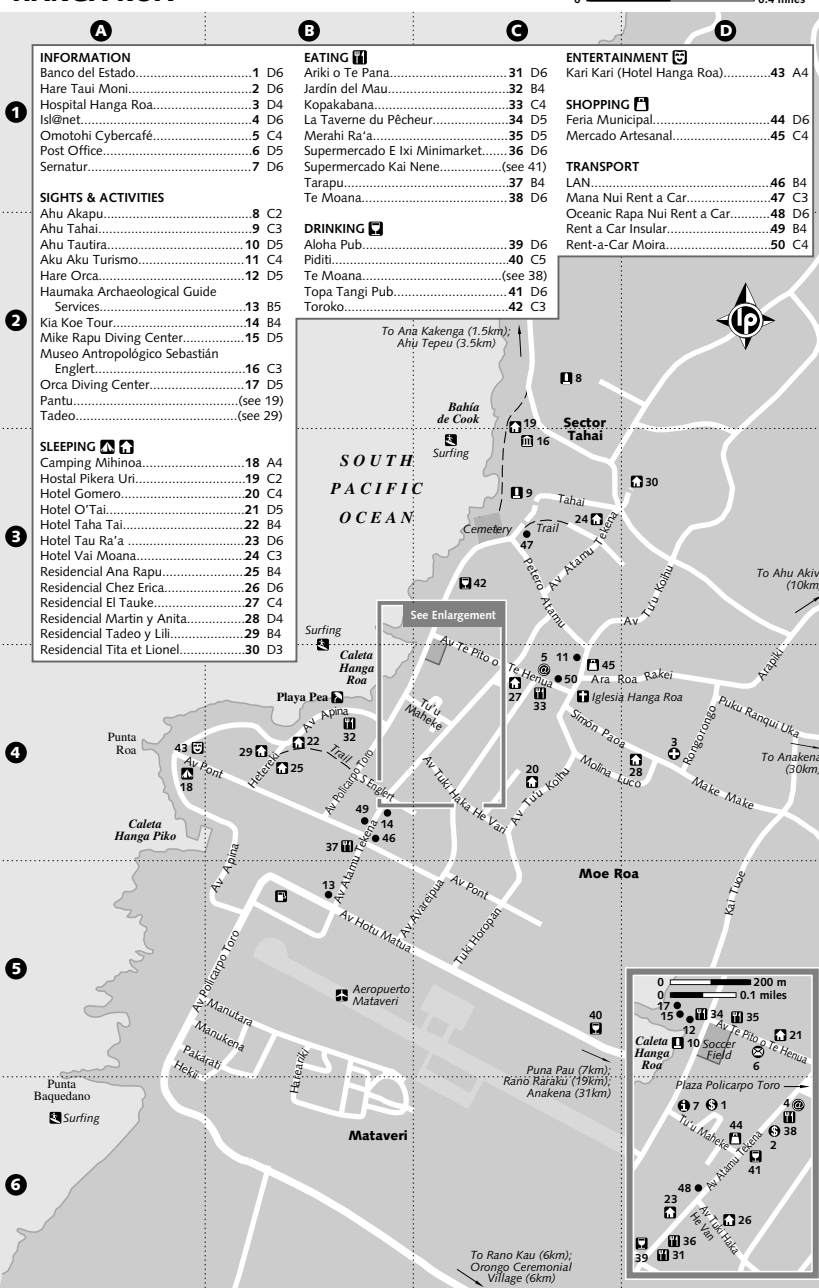
There's only one bank, **Banco del Estado** (Av Tu'u Maheke; ☎ 8am–1pm Mon–Fri). It changes US dollars and euros at reasonable rates but charges a hefty US\$10 commission on travellers cheques; there's also an ATM but it accepts only MasterCard. Visa holders can get cash advances at the counter during opening hours (bring your passport); the bank charges a US\$2 fee for the service.

The modest exchange office **Hare Tau'i Moni** (☎ 100 265; Av Atamu Tekena s/n; ☎ 9am–3pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat) charges a 15% commission on MasterCard or Visa cash advances and a US\$6 to US\$8 commission on travellers cheques. Its opening hours are a bit erratic.

Post

Post office (Av Te Pito o Te Henua; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2.30–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat) Half a block from Caleta Hanga Roa.

HANGA ROA



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.kiakoetour.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 Martín 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. Martín 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 Sernatur.

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 (☎ 551 447; 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** (cnr Av Atamu Tekena & Tu'u Maheke) and the **Mercado Artesanal** (cnr 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 southwest, 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

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **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

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.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Federated States of Micronesia

Often referred to as 'Micronesia', the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is often assumed to be simply another island agglomeration, like the Northern Mariana Islands perhaps, with a shared cultural identity. Yet the FSM tag is an arbitrary construct, lumping together the four unique states of Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap; about the only element they share is a history of oppression and occupation under various colonial powers.

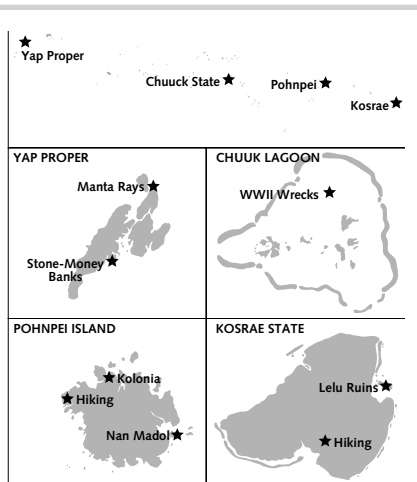
The four states have distinct cultures, traditions and identities, as colourful and diverse as the multitudes of coral formations that live in their fringing reefs. Chuuk is renowned for its wreck diving – explore an underwater WWII 'museum' that's hailed as one of the world's ultimate aquatic experiences; Yap is the most traditional state, resisting the onslaught of Western mores with true island spirit; Kosrae is a Pacific paradise, possibly the FSM's most beautiful island; while Pohnpei is home to mysterious ancient ruins and a plethora of lush landforms.

Travellers looking to experience a variety of lifestyles are in luck. Kosraeans are true believers; Kosrae is a state where everything shuts down on Sunday and full focus is given to vibrant all-singing, all-dancing church ceremonies (with a relaxed island twist, naturally). Yap's people retain their culture, their skills, their architecture, their customs, their religions, their gigantic stone money – it's an eternally fascinating place. Pohnpei retains its system of chiefs and clan titles, a distant style of governance that still exerts significant social and political influence. Then there's misunderstood Chuuk – although the island is just starting to come to terms with international tourism, the uncompromising nature of the Chuukese holds firm.

If you can't find something to expand your world-view in the FSM, check your pulse.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sample some of the Pacific's best diving, including Chuuk's amazing **WWII wrecks** (p124) and Yap's beautiful **manta rays** (p131)
- Explore Kosrae's **Lelu ruins** (p105) and Pohnpei's ancient stone city, **Nan Madol** (p114), for a taste of island mystery
- Marvel at Yap's enormous **stone-money banks** (p130) for a well-preserved glimpse into traditional Yapese values
- Stroll around **Kolonia** (p111), a vibrant, ramshackle hub that's also the FSM's biggest town
- Hike around the lush volcanic swells of **Pohnpei** (p109) and **Kosrae** (p103) for joyous outdoor vibes



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Temperatures on all FSM islands average 26°C to 27°C (80°F to 81°F) year round. The wettest months are in late spring and summer; rainfall is heaviest on Pohnpei, where the interior gets as much as 10,000mm annually, making it one of the rainiest places on earth. Yap is the driest island. For more climatic information, see p827.

The FSM is outside classic typhoon tracks; on Kosrae strong storms are rare, although the other states are not immune from them.

In July 2002, Supertyphoon Chataan hit Chuuk. Thirty-seven people died and almost 1300 people lost their homes, while enormous crop damage caused debilitating food shortages.

In April 2004, Yap was hit by Super-typhoon Sudal, which destroyed or damaged just about every building on the atoll; one person died, 1500 people were left homeless, and water, electricity and phone services were lost.

HISTORY Magic & Empires

Pottery and other archaeological finds on Map Island date the earliest known Yapese settlement at around AD 200.

The Yapese once reigned over a scattered empire, ranging as far north as the Mariana Islands and encompassing Chuuk to the east. This empire was built on the powers of magic: the Yapese employed sorcerers who were believed to have the powers to induce famine, sickness and typhoons.

The Saudeleurs, a tyrannical royal dynasty, ruled medieval Pohnpei; they reigned from Nan Madol, an elaborate city of stone fortresses and temples. By 1400, stratified Kosrae was unified under one paramount chief, who ruled from the island of Lelu.

There are indications that Kosrae was also once an important power in the region. Pohnpeian legend says that around the 14th century, Kosraean warriors sailed to Pohnpei and overthrew the Saudeleurs.

Chuukese legend says that around the 14th century the great leader Sowukachaw came by canoe to Chuuk with his son Sowooniiras; where they really came from is anybody's guess, but most people put their money on Kosrae since in Chuuk (as in Pohnpei) there are many legends relating to Kosrae.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA FACTS

- Capital city (and island):** Palikir (Pohnpei)
- Population:** 108,105
- Land area:** 702 sq km
- International telephone code:** 691
- Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- Languages:** English and state languages
- Greeting:** Lotu wo; Kaselehie; Ran annim; Mogethin ('Hello' in Kosraean; Pohnpeian; Chuukese; Yapese)
- Website:** www.visit-fsm.org

Retribution & Massacres

Early attempts to settle Yap were half-hearted at best. In 1731 a Spanish Jesuit mission was established on Ulithi Atoll, but when a supply ship returned a year later, it found that the islanders had killed all the colonists.

Apparently Europeans got the hint and for the next 100 years their visits to Yap were few and far between.

Europeans sighted Kosrae at least as early as 1801, but it wasn't until 1824 that a Western ship finally pulled into harbour – the French ship *Coquille*, captained by Louis Duperrey.

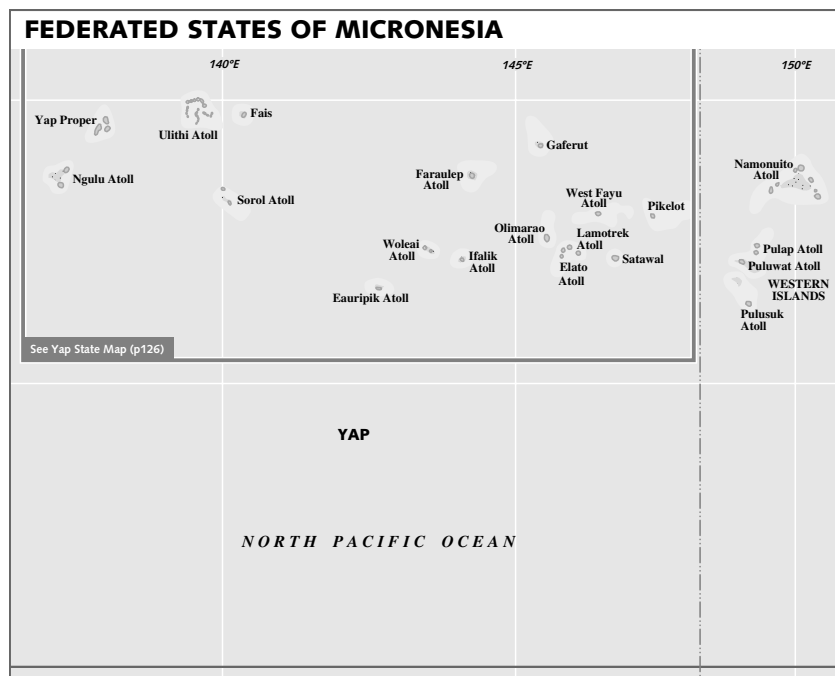
In 1835 Kosraeans torched the Hawai'ian ship *Waverly* and massacred the entire crew, apparently as revenge on the sailors who had bedded island women without first getting permission from Kosraean men.

In the early 1840s relations again became harmonious under the reign of Chief Awane Lapalik I, who was known as 'Good King George' by visiting Westerners.

Suppression & Rebellion

Diseases spread by visiting Westerners took their toll on Pohnpei; the indigenous population dropped from 10,000 in the early 19th century to 5000 by century's end.

The Spanish began to occupy Pohnpei in 1886, following the papal arbitration that gave Spain authority over the Caroline Islands. They didn't receive a hospitable welcome. Three months after his arrival, Pohnpei's first Spanish governor was killed in a rebellion by Pohnpeians



protesting the use of forced native labour to build Spanish forts.

The Germans arrived in 1899 after buying the Carolines from the Spanish. The infamous 1910–11 Sokehs Rebellion was sparked when a German overseer beat a Pohnpeian working on a labour gang on Sokehs Island. The Pohnpeians killed the overseer and the revolt was on.

The Germans promised revenge, blockading Kolonia and sending Melanesian troops charging up Sokehs Ridge. The uprising was suppressed and the 17 rebel leaders were executed and thrown into a mass grave. The Germans then exiled 426 Sokehs residents to Palau and brought in people from other Micronesian islands to settle on Sokehs.

In 1914 the Japanese navy took control of the islands, and their numbers dwarfed that of the locals.

All That & World War, Too

As WWII approached, the Yapese were forced to build airfields and military fortifications for the Japanese. As punishment

for noncooperation the Japanese would smash pieces of Yap's highly valued *rai* (stone money), sometimes using the broken pieces as road fill.

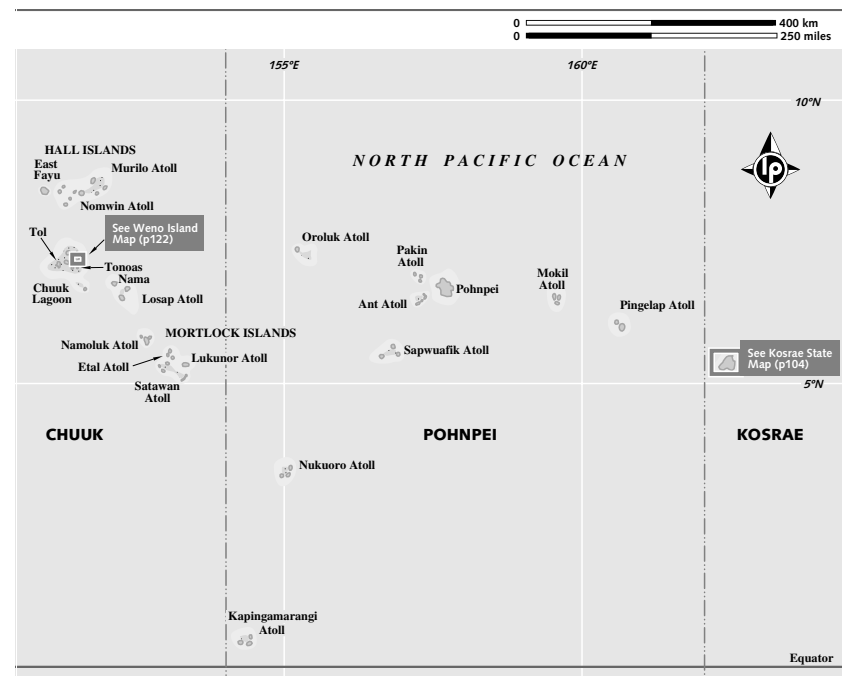
During WWII, US forces decided not to invade Yap Proper, although they bombed the island during air raids. Ulithi Atoll was captured and developed into a major Allied support base in 1944.

On Kosrae, developments in agriculture, forestry, fishing and copra helped support the Japanese war effort during WWII. Allied forces never invaded Kosrae.

At the beginning of WWII there were nearly 14,000 Japanese, Okinawans and Koreans living on Pohnpei and only about 5000 Pohnpeians. Although Japanese military were hit by US aerial bombings throughout 1944 and Kolonia was virtually levelled, Pohnpei was not invaded.

Chuuk's huge, sheltered lagoon became the Japanese Imperial Fleet's most important central Pacific base, so impenetrable that it was called the 'Gibraltar of the Pacific'.

On 17 February 1944, the US navy air-bombed the Japanese fleet docked in the



lagoon and sank some 60 ships, which lie on the bottom today.

In July 1978 the Trust Territory districts of Pohnpei, Kosrae, Chuuk, Yap, the Marshall Islands and Palau voted on a common constitution. The Marshalls and Palau rejected it and went on to establish separate countries.

What was left became, by default, the Federated States of Micronesia.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Given that the FSM as a 'nation' is a political rather than a cultural construct, it's hard to describe elements of it in 'national' terms.

There's not a lot of unity. In fact, the other FSM states see Chuuk as an economic burden; the Chuukese unemployment rate is 34%, amid serious allegations of government corruption and other fiscal woes. Pohnpei has mooted the possibility of seceding from the FSM, while Yap talks of joining the Republic of Palau – this is unsurprising, given that the Yapese share more ties with Palauans than they do with Chuukese, Kosraeans or Pohnpeians.

Lifestyle

On Kosrae, traditionally, everything closes on Sunday and church becomes the only activity. The service includes prayers, a sermon, hymns, glorious choral singing and psalm readings. Attending is a fine way to experience local culture.

Most people in Kosrae still rely on subsistence farming and fishing for their livelihood, as they do in Chuuk, where the main crops are breadfruit, coconuts, bananas and taro. Copra production provides some local income.

Each Chuukese island has a predominant clan, generally the descendants of the first people to settle that island. Members still enjoy limited privileges.

On Pohnpei, agriculture is important and subsistence farming widespread. Although Pohnpeian society is becoming Westernised, many Pohnpeians retain a title related to the clan system.

Pohnpeian funeral feasts are important social events that can last for days, and everyone brings gifts of food and *sakau* (see the boxed text, p119). Dog is a traditional

feast food, but the casual visitor is unlikely to come across it.

Most Yapese continue to make a living in subsistence farming and fishing, and copra production is still important on the outer islands.

In Yap to this day the village in which one is born determines one's name and caste. Members of a village belong to the same caste, although their rank within that caste varies. Caste has a more profound effect on people's status than upon their standard of living.

Both Western and traditional dress are seen all around Yap.

Population

The people of the remote Pohnpeian islands of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi are the only Polynesians in the FSM.

ARTS

All the FSM states have beautiful handicrafts and dances. See the individual island sections for details.

Literature

The horror writer HP Lovecraft used Pohnpei and Nan Madol as settings for his stories *Out of the Aeons* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Lovecraft's disciple August Derleth did the same in various works.

His Majesty O'Keefe (1950), by Lawrence Klingman and Gerald Green, tells the true story of David O'Keefe, the Irish-American sailor who landed on Yap in the late 1800s, where he evolved into a very successful entrepreneur (see the boxed text, p128). The book was made into a film in 1954, directed by Byron Haskin, and starring Burt Lancaster as O'Keefe in a performance des-

cribed by one critic as 'filled with manic over-confidence, heroic muscularity, and toothy self-esteem'.

Island of the Sequined Love (1998), by Christopher Moore, details the absurd adventures of a pilot named Tuck, who is posted on a cargo run to the Yapese islands. There, he discovers bizarre cargo cults, a black market in native vital organs, a mad doctor, a crazed sex goddess, a Filipino transvestite navigator and a talking fruit bat.

LANGUAGE

The islands have their own indigenous languages, although English is the official government language for inter-island communications. Besides the main languages, on Pohnpei Mokilese, Pingelapese, Ngatikese and Nukuoro-Kapingamarangi are spoken. On Chuuk, there are several minority dialects. On Yap, outer islanders also speak Ulithian, Woleaian and Satawalese.

ENVIRONMENT

The FSM has 607 islands sprinkled across more than 2.6 million sq km of the Pacific, extending 2899km from east to west. About 65 islands are inhabited.

Pohnpei has nearly half the land area, with the rest almost equally divided between the other three states.

Geography

Kosrae is the easternmost island of both the FSM and the Caroline Island chain; it's the only FSM state with no outer islands. Seventy per cent of the island is mountainous and another 15% is given over to mangrove swamps. Lelu, Utwe and Okat are the main deepwater harbours and all villages are along the coast.

BEST EATING

You won't find local delicacies like Chuukese preserved breadfruit or Pohnpeian dog in the islands' restaurants. There's still wonderful variety, though, and some superb eating houses.

- Inum (p109), in Kosrae's largest traditional-style building, serves outstanding seafood.
- Village Hotel Restaurant (p118), on Pohnpei, serves the freshest seafood in a romantic, open-air, thatched-roof dining area.
- Veranda View Conservatory Restaurant (p133), on Yap, boasts the island's only local chef, who utilises a delectable variety of local foodstuffs.

Kosrae is roughly triangular and about one-third the size of Pohnpei Island, the largest island in the FSM and Micronesia's third largest; Pohnpei is also high and volcanic and it's roughly circular.

Pohnpei's interior has rugged mountain ridges and deep valleys and its coastline is mainly tidal flats and mangrove swamps. In between the island and its surrounding circular reef is a 181-sq-km lagoon containing dozens of small islands, many with lovely white-sand beaches.

Chuuk State includes 192 outer islands, in addition to the 15 main islands and

THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA IN...

Continental is the only airline flying to the FSM and it has an infamously inflexible schedule – you need to plan carefully. See the boxed text, p135, for details.

Two weeks

In the first week, the excellent diving in Chuuk (p124) could fill three or four days. You could then round out the rest of the week exploring Pohnpei (p109).

In the second week, glorious, unhurried Kosrae (right) could be good for three days, while four days in Yap (p126), with its traditional culture and excellent diving, would be sweet as a nut.

more than 80 islets that make up Chuuk Lagoon. About 40 of the state's islands are inhabited.

Yap Proper consists of the four tightly clustered islands of Yap, Tomil-Gagil, Map and Rumung; the islands are 830km south-west of Guam. The interior regions are full of gentle rolling hills.

KOSRAE

pop 7686 / area 109 sq km

Kosrae (pronounced 'ko-shrye') is one of Micronesia's least spoilt and least developed areas, an unhurried place rich in stunning natural beauty. On this casual, unpretentious island, dubbed the 'Sleeping Lady', people consistently return a smile – more than a few dozen visitors at any one time is considered a stampede, and residents are naturally curious when newcomers arrive.

Kosrae's peaks are draped in lush tropical greenery; when they're shrouded in clouds, you know you're witnessing something special. The interior contains uncharted rainforests and mangrove swamps, and there's a pristine fringing reef and many delightful sandy beaches to explore. Flowering hibiscus, and bananas and coconuts are abundant, and the island is known for its citrus fruit, especially oranges, tangerines and limes.

The ruins of Kosrae's ancient stone city, Lelu, are not as well known as Pohnpei's Nan Madol ruins, but they're almost as impressive and more easily accessible, plus there's some good diving and surfing for aquatic types.

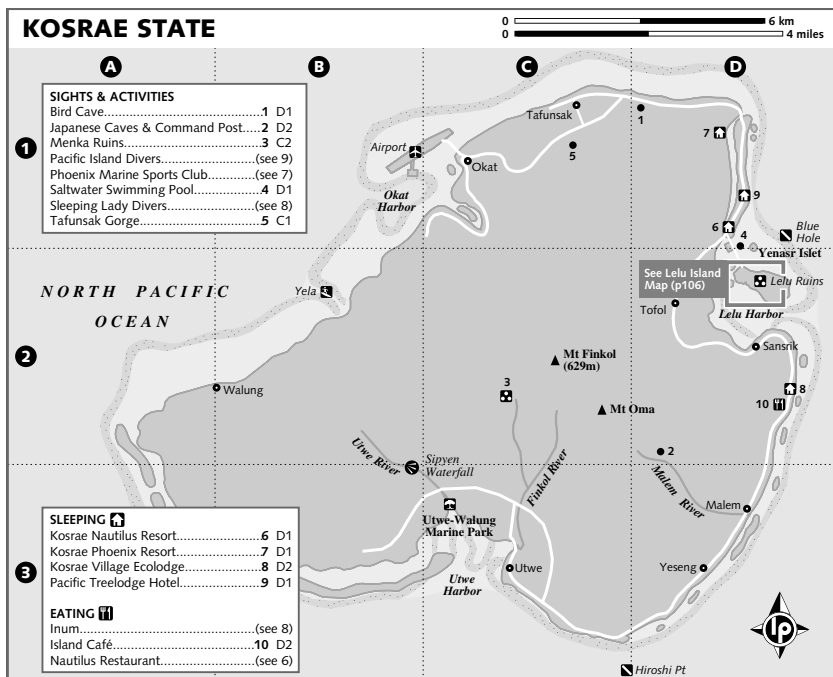
ORIENTATION

Kosrae has one major road that circles the island; it now extends to Walung, which was previously accessible only by boat. The capital, Tofol, is on the east coast.

The airport is about 12km away, on an artificial island off the northwest side of Kosrae; it's about a 20-minute drive from Tofol or Lelu. The hotels provide free transportation to and from the airport for their guests. If you haven't made arrangements before you arrive, call from the airport and the hotel will send someone out to fetch you.

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA LANGUAGE BASICS

English	Kosraean	Pohnpeian	Chuukese	Yapese
Hello.	<i>Lotu wo.</i>	<i>Kaselehie.</i>	<i>Ran annim.</i>	<i>Mogethin.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Kut fwa osun.</i>	<i>Kaselehie.</i>	<i>Kone nom.</i>	<i>Kefel.</i>
How are you?	<i>Kom fuhkah?</i>	<i>la iromw?</i>	<i>Ifa usum?</i>	<i>Ke us rogom buoch?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Nga ku na.</i>	<i>I kehlaile.</i>	<i>Ngang mei pochokum.</i>	<i>Kab fe'1 rogom, kam magar.</i>
Please.	<i>Nunakmuna.</i>	<i>Menlam.</i>	<i>Kose mwochen.</i>	<i>Wenig ngom.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Kulo (ma lunhlthp).</i>	<i>Kalahngan.</i>	<i>Kiniso/Kilisou.</i>	<i>Kam magar.</i>
Yes.	<i>Aok.</i>	<i>Eng.</i>	<i>Wuu.</i>	<i>Arrogo'n.</i>
No.	<i>Moohi.</i>	<i>Soo.</i>	<i>Apw.</i>	<i>Danga'.</i>



INFORMATION

There are no ATMs on Kosrae; credit cards are accepted at hotels.

Bank of the FSM (Map p105; ☎ 370 8952)

FSM Telecommunications (Map p105; Tofol; Internet access per hr US\$4) Place long-distance calls here.

Hospital (Map p105; ☎ 370 3012; Tofol)

Kosrae visitor information centre (Map p105;

☎ 370 2228; Tofol; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu)

Post office (Map p105; Tofol; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) Next to the bank.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

See p135 for information on international flights.

Getting Around

A taxi from the airport to your hotel will cost around US\$4; in general, it's much cheaper to rely on taxis than to rent a car. Try **JM Taxi** (☎ 370 3658).

For car hire, try **Andy's Car Rental** (☎ 370 2308), **Neime's Car Rental** (☎ 370 3368) or **Senny's Car Rental** (☎ 320 3288). Alternatively, ask at your hotel for room-and-car packages.

Cycling is a good way to see the island, but be warned that there's no pavement; on the plus side, locals drive slowly and are courteous. **Pacific Treelodge Hotel** (Map p104; ☎ 370 2102) hires out bicycles (US\$15 per day).

BULLY BOY

Traders started arriving on Kosrae in the 1870s, among them the American 'Bully' Hayes, a notorious swindler and trader who roamed the Pacific after years of involvement in China's opium trade. He was a frequent visitor to Kosrae, where he traded in *bêche-de-mer*, copra and coconut oil.

In March 1874, Hayes' 218-ton brigantine *Leonora* sank in Utwe Harbor during a storm. Hayes was murdered at sea three years later in a brawl with his ship's cook, Dutch Pete. Some believe that at the time he died, he was on his way back to Kosrae to recover the treasure he'd rescued from the sinking *Leonora* and reputedly buried somewhere on the island. These rumours have inspired many a treasure hunt on Kosrae.

TOFOL

Kosrae's state administrative centre is so small it seems kooky to think of it as the centre of anything – it's just a few buildings scattered here and there along a couple of dusty roads. There's a beautiful backdrop, though: Mt Finkol (629m) looming in the distance.

The **Kosrae Museum** (Map p105; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu) is up the narrow dirt road just past the farmers market; the top of the hill has a sweet view of Tofol and Lelu Island. The museum has only one room, with charts and drawings detailing different parts of Lelu's history and photos of archaeological work. Other artefacts include ancient basalt food pounders, an outrigger canoe made from a breadfruit tree trunk, and the ship's log from the pirate ship *Leonora* (see the boxed text, opposite).

LELU ISLAND

Also spelled and pronounced 'Leluh', Lelu Island is connected to the rest of Kosrae by a causeway; there's a natural **saltwater swimming pool** (Map p104) off to the left at the start of the causeway, a deeply cut expanse that's full of water even when the tide is low and the flats surrounding it are exposed. It's a great place to swim.

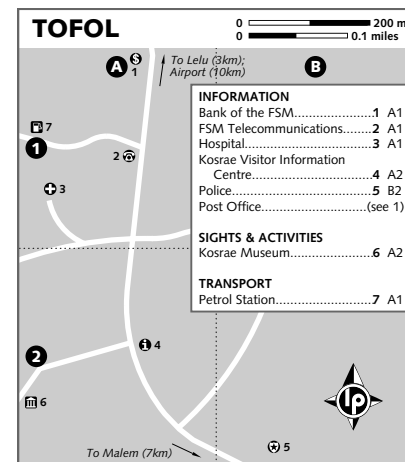
Lelu Hill, the island's high point, has **WWII caves and tunnels** used by the Japanese.

Lelu Ruins

The early Kosraeans artificially extended Lelu by piling stones and packing coral upon the surrounding reef, using the new land to build a massive walled city for Kosraean royalty. Dating back to at least AD 1400 (maybe to AD 1250), this feudal capital covered Lelu's entire lowland area; its ruins, hidden from the road, still cover one-third of the island.

A ride around Lelu's perimeter road reveals only a sleepy waterfront village and a smattering of homes and businesses, with not a single stone wall in sight. But Lelu deceives, as the ruins are just behind these homes – beyond their backyards – and almost completely hidden by thick tropical vegetation.

Once you're inside the complex, Lelu's walls rise up around you and your perspective changes completely: suddenly you're in an ancient, hidden city, the kind of isolated



setting you might imagine trekking hours through dense jungle to find elsewhere in the world.

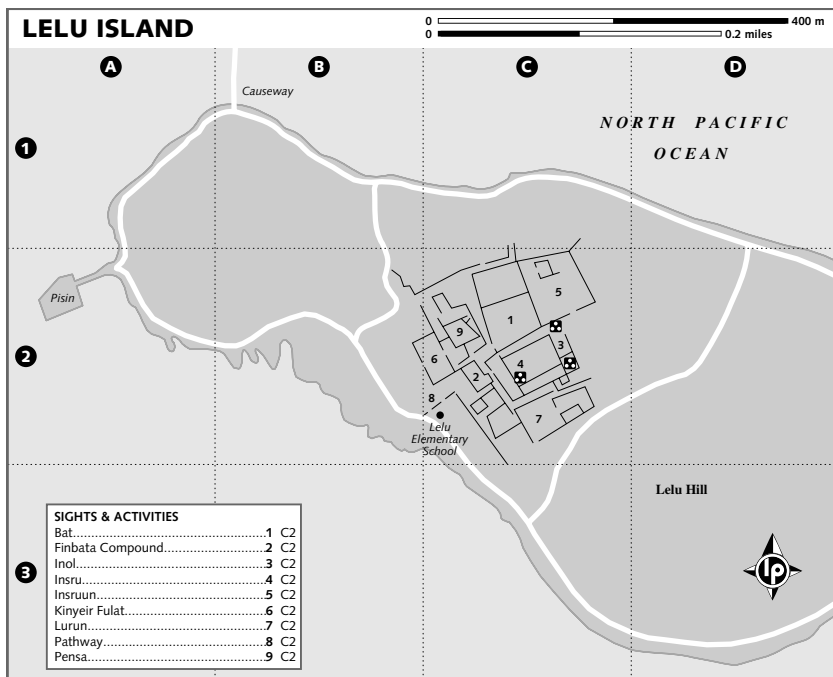
You can still see the dwelling compounds of the high chiefs, two royal burial mounds, a few sacred compounds and numerous large walls, built from huge hexagonal basalt logs stacked like a log cabin. On-site signs tell the full story.

To enter the ruins, take the driveway next to Lelu Elementary School; follow the path to the graveyard site and continue straight ahead through the complex. Just before crossing the channel, take the stone footpath on the right to get to the impressive **Kinyeir Fulat**, with its stacked prismatic basalt walls reaching 6m high; it's believed to have been both a dwelling compound and meeting house.

The compounds opposite Kinyeir Fulat are called **Pensa**. The walls at Pensa are mostly of medium-sized round basalt stones. The high chief's feast house occupied the southeastern compound, and the adjacent areas of Pensa, used for food preparation, still contain about 20 pounding stones.

Bat is the large dwelling compound across the canal from Pensa. Its high basalt walls are thought to be among the newest in town, dating from around AD 1600.

The **Finbata Compound**, just to the south of Bat, contains the remains of a feast house, while **Lurun**, a high-walled dwelling compound, offers another example of



impressive stacked prismatic architecture. **Insuun**, at the northeastern end of the complex, is thought to have originally been a dwelling compound that was later converted for other uses.

Insu and **Inol** contain mounded tombs that served as temporary resting places for deceased royalty. It was a sacred area, closed to commoners except for a group of wailing female mourners who, from the time the king was laid in the crypt, kept a continuous watch over his tomb and decaying body. After the king's flesh had decomposed, his bones were ceremoniously carried to Yenar Islet and dropped into a deep natural hole in the reef.

In 1910 a German excavation found a male skeleton in one of the tombs, presumably Lelu's last buried king.

Sleeping Lady

Looking southwards across Lelu Harbor towards Tofol, you'll see the rugged profile of the Sleeping Lady mountain range. To view the profile, imagine a woman lying on her back facing southeast, with her hair

flowing out behind her; the pointy 'breasts' are easy to spot.

According to legend, the gods were angry with a woman so they laid her in the sea in a sleeping position and turned her into the island of Kosrae. The woman was supposedly menstruating, so that accounts for the rich, red soil found in the jungle between her 'thighs'. Kosraean men used to trek into the interior to gather the red soil from this sacred place and use it to paint their canoes.

MALEM

At the mouth of the Malem River, about 5km south of Tofol, this is Kosrae's third-largest village.

Behind the municipal building, there's a small **stone monument** honouring the island's 700 WWII dead.

The first road to the right past the municipal building goes up to a small dam; this marks the beginning of a short, overgrown trail leading to the old **Japanese command post**. The commander's cave-bunker is a few minutes walk up the river's right side.

UTWE

Eight kilometres past Malem, at the mouth of the Finkol River, is the pleasant village of Utwe (also called Utwa). Here you'll find the **Utwe-Walung Marine Park** (☎ 370 2321; marinepark@mail.fm), a conservation area extending between Utwe and Walung; the office can organise cultural shows and guided tours. The park is within the Utwe-Walung Conservation Area, a fascinating, dense agglomerate of reefs, lagoons, mangrove channels and wetland forest.

There's a pretty 45-minute walk from Utwe up the Finkol River to some nice pools; ask anyone in Utwe how to get started. If you want to go all the way up Mt Finkol, you should ask for a guide; you'll be rewarded with a splendid view that includes all three of the island's harbours.

The **Menka ruins** lie in rainforest around Utwe, featuring the remains of basalt walls, living quarters and ceremonial platforms. The ruins were the sacred spot of Ninlaku, the goddess of nature and breadfruit.

AIRPORT TO LELU

The drive between the airport and Lelu is very pretty, offering mountain and coastal views, as well as up-close looks at Kosrae's oh-so-lush greenery. Approaching Lelu, you'll see picturesque **white-sand beaches** lined with coconut palms.

The bridge connecting the airport with the main island crosses a **reef channel** of striking turquoise waters; these are popular with snorkellers. Just beyond the bridge there's a **mangrove swamp**, where you might spot a grey Pacific reef heron scenically perched on bleached white logs.

Bird Cave

A large, swampy cave (Map p104) in the Wiya area is home to a sizable colony of swiftlets, who cling to the cave walls by their claws and build nests from dried saliva and moss. In flight, they resemble small bats.

Islanders collect the bird droppings in the cave bottom to use as a rich fertiliser. Like lots of other places in Kosrae, this big, swampy cave is thought to be haunted; locals reckon it's because of the Kosraean bodies supposedly left in the back of the cave by the Japanese.

There's no need to explore further, unless you've a powerful subterranean bent;

you can see this place easily from the road and the swiftlets can be spotted circling just outside the entrance. At any rate, it smells something shocking.

TAFUNSAK

Tafunsak, which stretches along the entire western flank of Kosrae, includes the remote Walung village, Okat Harbor, airport and Tafunsak village.

The steep 21m **gorge** in Tafunsak village makes for good exploring; it's extremely narrow, so be wary of flash floods.

To get there, take the path southeast from the crossroads in Tafunsak village; it's a 45-minute walk up the gorge, following an old steel water pipe.

Walung

A recent, unpaved extension of Kosrae's circle road connects Walung on the west coast with the rest of the island. Home to just a few hundred people and lined with lovely sandy beaches, Walung is the island's most traditional village and rather enjoys its isolation, though visitors are welcome. Tidal channels spanned by log footbridges crisscross the village, which has the foundations of an old mission.

You can hike to Walung following the southern coast; a guide is essential for this all-day, arduous trip.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

Kosrae has unspoiled coral reefs, varied marine life and visibility up to an amazing 60m in summer. Lelu Harbor holds a US PBY search plane, a 91m Japanese freighter skip-bombed during WWII, and the remains of a whaling ship. All these dives are best done during a spell of clement weather, as rain can substantially cut visibility.

Other good spots include the Blue Hole – across from the Kosrae Nautilus Resort – with coral heads, lionfish, stingrays and lots of big fish, including barracuda; and Hiroshi's Point, a drift dive to the south over beautiful soft coral.

There's good diving between Utwe Harbor and Walung, where large groupers, barracuda and hump-headed parrotfish can sometimes be spotted. At several places you can step into the water at high tide, swim out 15m to 30m and start diving.

DIVE SHOPS

Kosrae Nautilus Resort (Map p104; ☎ 370 3567; www.kosraenautilus.com; PO Box 135, Kosrae) Two-tank dive US\$95; snorkelling, including lunch (on the boat with/without divers) US\$30/55; circle-island boat tour (minimum two people) US\$125; kayak hire US\$15.

Pacific Island Divers (Map p104; ☎ 370 7856; www.divekosrae.com; PO Box 637, Kosrae) Run by the Pacific Treelodge Hotel. Two-tank dives US\$89; sunset cruises US\$10; kayaking trips (single/double) US\$20/30; snorkelling trips US\$40; fishing trips US\$70.

Phoenix Marine Sports Club (Map p104; ☎ 370 3100; phxkosrae@mail.fm; Lelu, PO 607, Kosrae) Run by the Kosrae Phoenix Resort.

Sleeping Lady Divers (Map p104; ☎ 370 3483; www.kosraevillage.com; PO Box 399, Kosrae) Run by the Kosrae Village Ecolodge. One-/two-tank dives US\$59/89, third tank extra US\$25; snorkelling US\$55; kayak hire US\$25; guided kayak tours, including lunch US\$35; fishing trips US\$65; blue-water hunting US\$65. Also offers outrigger canoe hire, rainforest hiking, mountain climbing and archaeological tours (US\$10 to US\$50 per person).

Snorkelling & Swimming

The best snorkelling and swimming spots change with the seasons and the trade winds. Conditions are usually good between Malem and Utwe in winter, though there are treacherous currents and rogue waves around Malem itself. The areas near Tafunsak, around the bridge to the airport and off Kosrae's northeast point are usually good in summer but can be rough from December to February. The northeast side of the airport runway is a favourite snorkelling spot, with 4m to 6m walls, lobsters, giant clams, stingrays and good visibility. Be cautious of channel currents.

The natural swimming hole formed in the reef alongside Lelu causeway is good for swimming, but it tends to silt up so it's not suitable for snorkelling.

Further out on the reef, the Blue Hole is larger and deeper and harbours lots of marine life and coral. This is where the early Kosraeans deposited the bones of their kings; snorkelling is good here – if you dare.

Kayaking & Canoeing

The Mutunnena Channel, wending past Kosrae Nautilus Resort on the eastern side of the island, and the Utwe/Walung Mangrove Channel, along the island's southwest fringe, are laced with thick mangroves; a canoe or kayak trip through them is magical. The

east-side channel, which actually winds beneath the wooden walkway that leads to Kosrae Village Ecolodge, is too narrow for an outrigger canoe but is perfect for kayaking.

Contact the dive operators, left, for tour information. **Utwe-Walung Marine Park** (☎ 370 2321) also organises canoe trips through its mangrove channel.

Hiking

Kosrae has many wonderful hikes, though some require guides as they go through private land and the trails are difficult to find. For a short hike in Tofol, the easy stroll up to the museum offers a pleasing view of the surrounding area and of Lelu. For something meatier, the hike up the Tafunsak Gorge makes for a pleasant little afternoon outing. The Japanese caves (Map p104) near Malem are a novel option.

The most rewarding and challenging hike is from Utwe to the top of Mt Finkol; it takes eight to 10 hours, and hikers should be in tip-top shape as it's a strenuous climb.

Another arduous hike is up Mt Oma, beyond the Japanese caves. A guide is necessary for the six-hour trip.

The trip to the Menka ruins (p107) is another good hike.

Surfing

Kosrae is coming up as a surf destination, kick-started by US Peace Corps volunteers on the island. Apparently, the best breaks are in Lelu's Pihkusrik district. For intermediate surfers, Malem is handy, while Imolsron, Wot and Yela in Walung are suitable for advanced surfers. Contact the visitor information centre (p104) for info on Peace Corps tours; **Sleeping Lady Divers** (☎ 370 3483) also has information.

KOSRAE FOR CHILDREN

It shouldn't be too hard to keep your little hellions occupied. If they misbehave, you could always instil the fear of God into them at one of Kosrae's **lively church services** (p101). Failing that, culture might just do the trick, and there's no better place than the **Lelu ruins** (p105); you might even like to play hide-and-seek behind an ancient basalt-log wall, thereby combining education and fun. **Lelu Island** (p105) in general is terrific for kids; strolling around the perimeter road, you're bound to bump into

Kosraean kids playing in the bushes, by the waterside and by the road. A spot of **kayaking** (opposite) might go down nicely. Failing all of this, teach your brood how to recognise the outline of the **Sleeping Lady** (p106) – although if you haven't taught them the birds and the bees yet, you might want to skip this option.

TOURS

The dive shops offer trips and tours; see opposite for details.

Kosrae Adventure Tours (☎ 370 4405) Waterfall hike or beach hike (three hours) US\$20; Mt Oma hike or river hike (five hours) US\$20; full-service camping US\$25; wild-pig hunting (half day) US\$20.

Utwe-Walung Marine Park (☎ 370 2321) Menka ruins tour US\$25.

SLEEPING

If you want to camp, it's best to approach the mayor of the village where you want to pitch your tent; he can find locals willing to let you camp on their land. The visitor information centre (p104) should have some suggestions.

Kosrae Village Ecolodge (Map p104; ☎ 370 5839; www.kosraevillage.com; PO Box 399, Kosrae; s/d from US\$89/109) The Village is a very special place, constructed from native materials in the style of an old-time Kosraean village and shaded by coconut and pandanus trees. The grounds are amazing: these superbly rustic bungalows are tucked between the mangrove channel and the ocean, all linked by connecting walkways through the jungle. Everything is wheelchair accessible.

Pacific Treelodge Hotel (Map p104; ☎ 370 7856; www.divekosrae.com; PO Box 637, Kosrae; s/d US\$55/75; ☎) These modern duplex cottages share a quirky feature – they're spread around a large mangrove pond, with the waters almost lapping at your back door. The rooms are large and comfortable and the staff are gracious and hospitable. The Treelodge is just across from a really gorgeous sliver of beach – island bliss. The grounds feature walkways that snake in and around the swamp; at the time of writing, a restaurant was being constructed at the swamp end of the walkway.

Kosrae Nautilus Resort (Map p104; ☎ 370 3567; www.kosraenautilus.com; PO Box 135, Kosrae; r from US\$75; ☎) This upmarket Australian-run place, a few minutes' walk from the

Lelu causeway, has comfortable, modern and clean rooms with minifridge and bath. Staff are very accommodating and there's a convivial atmosphere.

EATING

Inum (Map p104; ☎ 370 4686; mains US\$8-11; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Located at the Kosrae Village Ecolodge, in what is apparently the island's largest traditional-style building, Inum serves up outstanding food. The salads are superb, especially the Mangrove Crab Super Salad, which is filling enough to have as a main.

Nautilus Restaurant (Map p104; mains US\$8-15; ☎) lunch & dinner) At the Kosrae Nautilus Resort's restaurant, eat outside next to the pool or under a lovely thatched hut. Service is a little slow, but the food is excellent, ranging from pizza to local dishes such as breadfruit chips.

Island Café (☎ 370 3724; PO Box 331, Kosrae; mains US\$5-7) This cosy little café is the island's only nonhotel eating option and it's not too bad. Let 'Chef Dave' fix you a Locomoco Breakfast: fish with Spam. The dinner menu is also filling, with the seafood stir-fry probably the best pick.

SHOPPING

Typical Kosraean crafts include wooden taro pounders, carved canoes, woven bags and purses, and wall hangings of fibres and shells.

The visitor information centre (p104) sells a most pleasant CD of Kosraean music, entitled *Tidal Wave* (US\$10).

POHNPEI

pop 34,486 / area 345 sq km

Lush vegetation, jungle hillsides and flowering hibiscus: in many ways, Pohnpei fits the typical South Sea islands image, albeit a wet one, as copious rainfall feeds a multitude of streams, rivers and tumbling waterfalls.

Pohnpei's boldest landmark is the very scenic Sokehs Rock, a steep cliff face often compared to Honolulu's Diamond Head. The ancient stone city of Nan Madol, abandoned on nearly 100 artificial islets off the southeast coast, is Micronesia's best-known archaeological site and should be at the very top of your list of priorities.

0 10 km
0 6 miles



**FEDERATED STATES
OF MICRONESIA**

back streets, where dogs laze on the side of the road and every other yard, no matter how small, contains a pen of squealing pigs. About those dogs: they're absolutely everywhere. Some are mangy mutts, and some appear to be cute and domesticated, but most are very territorial, so don't be surprised if a pack of canines chases you on your back-street wanders. Be on your guard, as they can bite (but you will have your revenge: some Pohnpeians eat dogs).

Kolonia Walking Tour

Begin in the north of town at the **German bell tower (1)**, the only structure from Pohnpei's original Catholic mission that managed to survive WWII.

WALK FACTS

Start German Bell Tower

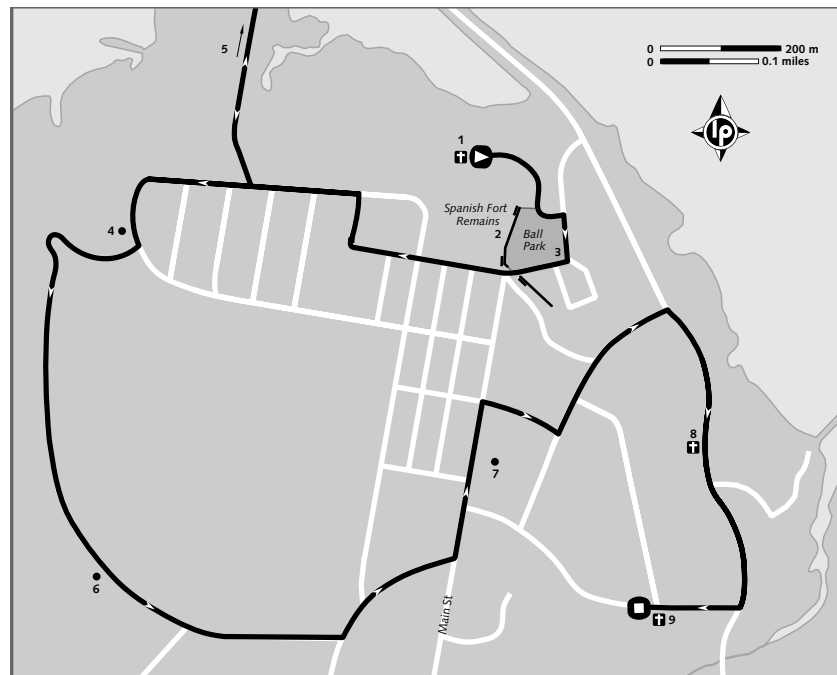
Finish Kosrae-Kolonia Congregational Church

Distance About 3.2km

Duration Two hours

Walk 150m southeast to the mossy remains of Kolonia's **Spanish stone walls (2)**, which were built around 1887 and once enclosed Fort Alphonse and large sections of Pohnpei's Spanish colony. One section of the old wall is at the side of the **ball park (3)**, while another starts across the street and runs along the road leading down to the waterfront. Often you'll be able to catch a softball game here or a lively church choir in the park on the other side of the wall; when the sun sets behind the wall, with rosy-fingered clouds splitting the trees, it's a magical sight.

Walk 600m to the west; the **German cemetery (4)**, behind the church down the hill from the South Park Hotel, holds the remains of sailors from the German cruiser *Emden* who died fighting the Sokehs rebels (see p100). It also has the grave of Victor Berg, the German governor who died suddenly and mysteriously in 1907 after excavating a Nan Madol grave (see the boxed text, p115). Unfortunately, the cemetery is overgrown and enclosed by a fence, so it's hard to make out the gravestones, but you might be able to feel some vibes.



The Sokehs rebels don't miss out; the **mass grave (5)** for the executed dissidents is in a residential area 500m northeast of the dead Germans. Look for the small, unmarked cement enclosure at the left edge of the road, shortly before the...er...dead end.

Backtracking past the German cemetery, take the road that goes through **Porakiet village** below. This will afford you a real slice of authentic Polynesian-Pohnpeian life, as you wend past men pounding out a *sakau* rhythm, dogs napping at bones (not yours, hopefully), kids playing in the street and women chatting to neighbours all day long.

Back on Main St, head north to the visitor information centre, where you'll find a small **Japanese tank (7)** painted in camouflage splottches.

Take the next right, just past the post office, then the first left until you come to the waterfront road on the eastern side of town. Turn right on the waterfront and you'll find old warehouse-style businesses, a public market, a few retail stores and the island's largest **Protestant church (8)**, built in the early 1930s.

Further down, to your right – between the College of Micronesia and the cinema – is the most colourful church in town, the **Kosrae-Kolonia Congregational Church (9)**, the place of worship for the island's Kosraean population.

PORAKIET VILLAGE

This village (Map p111) is home to the Polynesians who moved to Pohnpei from Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro Atolls following typhoon and famine disasters early last century. They live a more open and outdoor lifestyle than other Kolonians – their breezy, thatched homes with partly open-air sides are built on raised platforms half a metre off the ground.

The Kapingamarangi men make wood-carvings and the women weave; this enclave has sprouted a few outstanding craft shops (see p119).

SOKEHS ISLAND

Cross the causeway onto Sokehs (Map p110) and you'll see that the road divides; both ways come to a dead end rather than circle around.

It takes a half-day to walk around the island. The northern part is the road the

Germans built with forced labour in 1910, an incident that touched off the infamous rebellion (see p100).

The 275m **Sokehs Ridge**, loaded with **anti-aircraft guns, naval guns, pillboxes and tunnels**, has an excellent view of Kolonia and the surrounding reef, as well as nesting tropic-birds and fruit bats. The easy 45-minute trail starts on a 4WD road behind the municipal office.

The sheer, challenging climb up 152m **Sokehs Rock** (Map p110) yields an awesome view. After crossing the causeway, take the road to the right; the trail begins shortly before the end of the road, near the church. A guide is advisable.

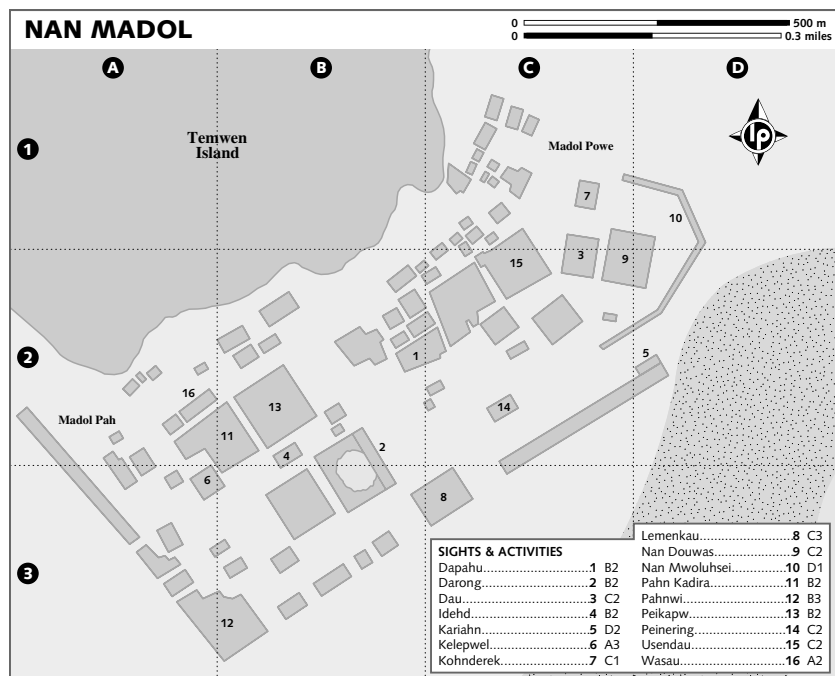
AROUND POHNPEI

There are several magnificent waterfalls off the circle-island drive. The 15m **Liduduhniap Waterfall** (Map p110) in Nett, a 15-minute drive from Kolonia, is a popular swimming spot. Take Kolonia's waterfront road heading south; turn right onto the paved road that starts just before the tyre shop. After 4.4km along this riverside road, there's a small power plant; continue for just over half a mile to where the road forks, turn left at the fork and stop at the kiosk 300m in. The trail to the waterfall begins at the small village directly opposite the kiosk. It's a five-minute walk to the falls along a pleasant hibiscus-lined path.

The 21m **Kepirohi Waterfall** (Map p110) is further along in Sapwehrek. It might look familiar: it's the impressive waterfall pictured in all the tourist brochures. The broad falls cascade over a basalt rock face into a pool that's fine for ultra-refreshing midday dips.

The waterfall is at the far end of the village of Sapwehrek. About 200m past Sapwehrek Elementary School, you'll cross a river followed by a small church on the right side of the road; park at the church and walk back 15m to the trail, which begins on the north side of the church property. It takes about 15 minutes to walk up to the falls.

Lehnpaipohn Waterfall (Map p110) is a pleasant 10m fall that drops into a wide, deep pool, ideal for swimming. To get to the trailhead when coming from Kolonia, continue 16km south of Palikir, at which point you'll cross the wide bridge that spans the Lehn Mesi River. About 1½km further



on, turn inland at the school bus stop, pass the Pohn Alamwahu Church and continue on the dirt road for another 2½km.

Palikir, the 54-hectare FSM capital complex built in 1989, incorporates traditional Micronesian architecture: Kosraean traditional-style roofs, Nan Madol-style black pillars, and beam ends that resemble Yapese stone money and Chuukese outrigger canoes.

An easy trail up the high volcanic cone of **Pwusehn Malek** (Chickenshit Mountain; Map p110) starts by the telephone pole on the right-hand side, about 2½km south of the Palikir capital complex. Legend says this formation was created during the defeat of Pohnpei's Saudeleur dynasty (see p99): Palikir's ruler became a giant rooster, flew to Nan Madol and left behind a huge mound of droppings. That's the 'chicken shit'; never let anyone tell you Pohnpeians don't have a sense of humour.

The paved road to Palikir heads uphill to the left just before the causeway to Sokehs Island; this is also the start of the circle-island road. The entrance to Palikir is 5.6km further down.

NAN MADOL

For many travellers, Nan Madol is the highlight of their Micronesian odyssey; it's a criminal offence to come to Pohnpei and not visit here.

An important political, social and religious centre built during the Saudeleur dynasty, Nan Madol was a place for ritual activity and the homes of royalty and servants. Comprising 92 artificial islets extending 1½km, it's built on the tidal flats and reef off the southeastern side of Pohnpei, near Temwen Island.

Wide basalt pillars, up to 7½m long, formed naturally into hexagonal columns. They were quarried on Pohnpei Island and hauled to the site by raft, then stacked horizontally around the islets as retaining walls; the resultant twisting canals are known as the 'Venice of Micronesia'. On the level surfaces were temples, burial vaults, meeting houses, bathing areas, and pools for turtles, fish and eels. The eastern half, **Madol Powe** (Upper Town), had priests and rituals; the western half, **Madol Pah** (Lower Town), was the administrative section.

Nan Madol's construction began between AD 1100 and 1200 and continued for another 200 to 300 years; it was uninhabited, though recently abandoned, when the first Westerners arrived in the 1820s.

Many of the ruins have collapsed, but that just adds to the dramatic impact, especially as you round a sharp corner in the canal and suddenly find yourself in the shadow of the massive **Nan Douwas**, the largest structure still standing and the most impressive. Its outer walls stand 7½m high and its inner compound contains four crypts, burial places for the Saudeleur dynasty and later the *nahnmwarki* (district chief).

The islet of **Kariahn** also has high walls surrounding a tomb. The administrative centre of Nan Madol was probably **Pahn Kadira**, which also featured the temple of the Thunder God. A large, low platform is all that remains of the temple.

The islet of **Idehd** was the religious centre. An annual ritual performed here by high priests culminated with the offering of cooked turtle innards to Nan Sanwohl, the 'holy eel' that was kept in the compound pool. The ritual was part of a two-week religious ceremony that included canoe-building competitions, feasting, singing, dancing and *sakau* drinking.

Darong, an important ritual area, has a natural reef pool in its centre, which may have been used for raising clams. Near one wall is a large stone once used for pounding *sakau*.

Other major islets are **Usendau**, an area where priests lived; **Nan Mwuluhsei** ('Where the Voyage Stopped'), the ocean entrance to Nan Madol; **Pahnwi**, a multipurpose islet that included burial tombs; **Kelepwel**,

a residential islet for servants and visitors; **Wasau**, an area where food was prepared; **Kohnderek**, a site for funeral services; **Dapahu**, an islet where canoes were made; **Dau**, a place where warriors lived; **Peikapw**, an islet that had two pools for turtles; **Lemenkau**, the medical centre; and **Peinerling**, a coconut-processing centre.

The dive companies provide boat tours of Nan Madol (p116). You can also arrange to have kayaks or canoes taken to Nan Madol so you can paddle through.

Visit by boat at high tide, so you can easily navigate the twisting mangrove-lined channels and see most of the islets.

You can try driving then wading across to Nan Madol, but the road will badly scrape your car belly and you won't be able to see most of the islets.

Make sure you pick up a copy of the informative Nan Madol brochure from the visitor information centre (p110).

ISLANDS IN POHNPEI LAGOON

Langer Island (Map p110), equipped with covered picnic tables, is a popular place for weekend family picnics and has clear waters with good swimming and snorkelling.

The small **Black Coral Island** (Map p110), on Pohnpei's southwestern barrier reef, is owned by a friendly Pohnpeian family and makes a fine place for either a day outing or an overnight getaway. There's nice coral around the island and splendid marine life on the ocean side. Be careful of strong tidal currents in the channel. A good spot for swimming and snorkelling, the island can also be a fun place for shell searching or just lying on the beach.

Contact the dive shops (p116) for tour information.

MYSTERIES OF NAN MADOL

Nan Madol is Pohnpei's foremost tourist spot, but not all Pohnpeians feel comfortable there; the local belief is strong that people shouldn't disturb the ruins. Actually, there's evidence this may be more than mere superstition: in 1907 Pohnpei's German governor, Victor Berg, died of a mysterious ailment immediately after excavating a burial tomb on Nan Madol. The German administration claimed it was heat exhaustion, but a lot of older Pohnpeians still doubt that diagnosis.

Nan Madol holds its mysteries well. Some believe that the legendary lost continent of Mu, or Lemuria, may lie off its waters and that Nan Madol was built as a mirror image of a sunken city that, at the time of construction, could still be seen lying beneath the water's surface.

The horror writer HP Lovecraft and his acolytes played on this legend in their stories, piling on many more layers of weirdness (see p102).

OUTER ATOLLS

Ant Atoll (Map pp100–1), a few miles south-west of Pohnpei Island, has white-sand beaches, abundant coral and fish that make for good diving, and a large sea-bird colony.

Pakin Atoll (Map pp100–1), a popular dive spot, is 40km off Pohnpei Island's north-western coast.

Oroluk Atoll (Map pp100–1) has a tiny population of only a dozen people, but a sizable population of hawksbills and Pacific green turtles.

Mokil Atoll (Map pp100–1) has friendly people, a pretty lagoon and a 300m airstrip.

Pingelap Atoll (Map pp100–1) is known for *kahlek*, a kind of night fishing that uses burning torches to attract flying fish into hand-held nets. Oliver Sacks, in his book *The Island of the Colourblind*, discusses the total colour blindness that arose on Pingelap after the population bottleneck caused by a cyclone that killed 90% of the island's population.

Sapwuafik Atoll (Map pp100–1), once known as Ngatik Atoll, is famed for its outrigger canoes, made from breadfruit logs and assembled using wooden pegs and coconut-fibre twine.

The 400 or so people of the beautiful **Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi Atolls** (Map pp100–1) are physically, linguistically and culturally Polynesian.

See p110 for information on getting to the atolls; the dive shops (right) also arrange tours.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Pohnpei has pretty coral reefs, manta rays and lots of fish. It's also possible to dive Nan Madol.

While snorkelling is not good on Pohnpei Island itself, small nearby atolls have good coral and marine life. Ant Atoll is a favourite diving spot for its schools of barracuda and reef sharks, as is Pakin Atoll for its virgin reefs with gorgonian fans and abundant marine life. Spring, summer and autumn are the best times for diving.

DIVE SHOPS

Aqua World Pohnpei Inc. (☎ 320 6556; http://homepage2.nifty.com/aquaworld/untitled1_001.htm; PO Box 1416, Kolonia) One/two dives US\$50/100; one dive at Pwohmaria Beach US\$25; one dive at Nahlap Island US\$35. Add-on to Ant Atoll US\$35, Pakin Atoll US\$35, Black Coral Island US\$35 and Na US\$35. Overnight camp tours to Ant Atoll US\$140, Nahlap Island US\$120, Black Coral Island US\$120 and Langer Island US\$100. Snorkelling and sightseeing tours to Ant Atoll US\$100, Nahlap Island US\$80, Langer Island US\$60, and Nan Madol and Kepirohi Waterfall by car/boat US\$40/100. Located at Pwohmaria Beach Resort.

Phoenix Marine Sports Club (Map p111; ☎ 320 5678; phoenix@mail.fm; PO Box 387, Kolonia, Pohnpei) One-/two-tank dives US\$56/86; Ant and Pakin Atolls extra US\$20; snorkelling including lunch US\$56; full-day fishing trip including lunch US\$400; Nan Madol and Kepirohi Waterfall full-day tour including lunch US\$56; land tours including lunch US\$46.

The Village (Map p110; ☎ 320 2797; www.thevillagehotel.com; PO Box 339, Pohnpei) Scuba diving with one/two/three or more divers US\$200/100/85. All-day boat tours (one/two/three or more people) to Nan Madol ruins and the waterfalls, with lagoon snorkelling, or to Japanese caves and reef islands with lagoon snorkelling US\$110/60/50. Kayak hire US\$25; kayak tours for one/two people US\$25/35; guided kayak tours US\$60 per person, minimum two people. Land tours, speciality tours (birding, fishing) and surfing also possible. Rates available on request.

BLOODY HART

A visit to Ngatik (now Sapwuafik) by the British ship *Lambton* in 1837 left an indelible mark on Pohnpei. Charles 'Bloody' Hart, the ship's Aussie captain, was after fine pieces of tortoiseshell he'd seen on an earlier excursion. But the shells had religious significance to the Ngatikese and they refused to trade; during the first visit, trading negotiations were halted by a group of armed islanders who attacked the crew and forced them to run for their lives back to the ship.

Hart was a swindler, accustomed to getting his own way, and although his crew had escaped unharmed they sought revenge. The Ngatikese, armed only with clubs and slings, had little defence against the muskets of the *Lambton*'s crew, and the sailors massacred all the island men.

As a result, the 600 people of Sapwuafik Atoll are largely descended from a mix of Ngatikese women and British, American, Pohnpeian and Gilbertese men, many of them crew members of the *Lambton*.

Surfing

Surfers are discovering Pohnpei, where the waves break a long way from the beach; it's like Tahiti, they say. It's certainly a unique experience; you can't paddle out so you need to catch a boat to the waves. Palikir Pass (P-Pass) is the exemplar of Pohnpeian surfing, followed by Main Pass (Sokehs Pass).

The **Pohnpei Surf Club** (☎ 320 7845; www.pohnpeisurfclub.com; PO Box 1893, Pohnpei) organises trips and guides.

Hiking & Other Activities

The two main hikes around Kolonia are on Sokehs Island (p113); hikes into the interior need a guide.

Trolling, bottom-fishing and spear-fishing trips can be arranged through the dive shops (opposite).

POHNPEI FOR CHILDREN

Take the kids for a stroll around **Kolonia** (p111). The town is guaranteed to amuse; try a picnic in the park next to the **Spanish stone walls** (p112). A walk through **Porakiet village** (p113) is guaranteed to please; it's a vibrant slice of island life. Pohnpei's waterfalls – **Liduduhniap** (p113), **Kepirohi** (p113) and **Lehnpaipohn** (p113) – are pleasant spots for a swim, and you can arrange a kid-friendly tour that embraces them (opposite). **Langer Island** and **Black Coral Island** (p115), in the lagoon, make excellent day trips for the family, with good beaches and swimming opportunities. Finally, there's **Nan Madol** (p114), the ancient ruined city that's an eye-opener for human beings of all ages.

TOURS

For information on tours, contact the dive shops, opposite.

SLEEPING

Camping can be arranged on the uninhabited islands of Ant and Pakin Atolls; ask the visitor information centre (p110) to help with arrangements.

Ocean View Plaza Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 7049; www.fm/oceanview; PO Box 416, Kolonia; r from US\$53; ☼) This upscale joint is on a hill overlooking Kolonia Harbor; it's as scenic as you'd guess. The rooms have mountain or harbour views. It's a bit sterile but that's probably because it's clean and modern. Not too bad a place. You can hire cars here.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Village Hotel (Map p110; ☎ 320 2797; www.thevillagehotel.com; PO Box 339, Pohnpei; r from US\$103) This outstanding resort, perched on a hillside 8km east of Kolonia, has 20 local-style thatched cottages, each with two queen waterbeds, wicker furniture, mosquito netting, screened windows and private bathrooms. Prime views cost a bit more, but the whole place is simply delightful. There's a fantastic restaurant (see p118) on the premises, and you can take your meals on a scenic-beyond-words gazebo that juts out over the jungle. The owners are friendly and accommodating, and they have obvious love for the island of Pohnpei, which translates into an ideal Micronesian experience for you, the traveller.

South Park Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 2255; parkhotel@mail.fm; PO Box 829, Pohnpei; s/d old wing US\$43/48, new wing US\$80/90; ☼) This place has a fine hillside location. The new wing has pleasant rooms with verandas boasting an unspoiled view of Sokehs Rock, while the old wing also has fine ocean views but a more cottagelike atmosphere (and rooms are pretty basic).

Nara Gardens (Map p111; ☎ 320 2774; bnm@mail.fm; PO Box 307, Kolonia; studio/deluxe units US\$40/50) This pleasing little budget spot has a few apartments for overnight guests (and a few for long-term stays); each apartment has twin beds, a TV and kitchenette, and the friendly management lives just across the street. It's advisable to make advance reservations given the limited space. Credit cards are not accepted.

Pwohmaria Beach Resort (☎ 320 5941; pwohmaria.beach@mail.fm; PO Box 1416, Nett) These beachside cottages are squeezed between the commercial dock and the airport's backside. The runway proximity could disrupt sleep – Pohnpei has several late-night flights. The clean cottages have a rustic appeal, with wood interiors and wicker furniture; ceiling fans and a stiff sea breeze keep them cool.

Cliff Rainbow Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 2415; rainbow@mail.fm; s US\$40–85, d US\$48–95; ☼) This hotel has two classes of rooms; the cheaper rooms are in an older section that's really quite ordinary and not much chop at all, although they are clean and adequate. The

newer rooms are bigger, and well...newer – and just as clean. There's a restaurant on site and the staff are sweet.

Also:

Joy Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 2447; joy_ponape@mail.fm; PO Box 484, Pohnpei; s/d US\$69/90; ☞) This town hotel has nicely furnished rooms with balconies.

PCR Hotel (Map p110; ☎ 320 4981; pcr_pohnpei@mail.fm; PO Box 101, Pohnpei; s/d US\$65/85; ☞) Rooms overlooking the water on the Nett Peninsula.

Sea Breeze Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 2065; PO Box 692, Pohnpei; back view s/d US\$45/56, front view US\$56/67; ☞) A good option on the harbour road; some rooms have ocean views.

Yvonne's Hotel (Map p111; ☎ 320 5130; yneth@hotmail.com; PO Box 688, Pohnpei; old rooms s/d US\$55/65, new rooms US\$65/75; ☞) Pleasant rooms in a central location.

EATING

Peppermill (Map p111; ☎ 320 7612; PO Box 310, Kolonia; mains US\$10-20; ☞ lunch & dinner) This is Pohnpei's newest restaurant, and it's a bit more upmarket than most. The macadamia-nut chicken with papaya and pineapple is indicative of its fresh approach. The décor tries hard, too, with prints on the walls depicting scenes of island life.

PCR Hotel Restaurant (Map p110; ☎ 320 4981; PO Box 101, Pohnpei; mains US\$8-15; ☞ lunch & dinner) This place, on the way to Sokehs, has a loyal following that appreciates its great waterfront setting and consistently excellent food. It serves Japanese food, including sushi on a conveyor belt, as well as Italian pizza and pasta. There's music some nights – gospel, bluegrass, what-have-you.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Village Hotel Restaurant (Map p110; ☎ 320 2797; PO Box 339, Pohnpei; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) As it does with accommodation, so it comes up trumps with good eating; you've got to come here when the sun's going down for the ultimate dining experience. Perched on a ridge overlooking the lagoon, the open-air dining room is encased in what's touted as Micronesia's 'largest thatched-roof building'; it is indeed impressive. That would probably be enough to convince most people, but the capper is that the food is absolutely superb. You'll be wanting to try the chilled sashimi.

Joy Restaurant (Map p111; ☎ 320 2336; PO Box 454, Kolonia; dishes US\$6-9; ☞ lunch) This place is a lunch specialist and a perennial favourite at that, forever dishing up a menu of excellent Japanese food. Fresh fish is the speciality, though there are beef and chicken dishes, too.

South Park Restaurant (Map p111; ☎ 320 2255; South Park Hotel; mains US\$9-16; ☞ lunch & dinner) Another place that packs 'em in (such as can be done on Pohnpei), with a varied menu and a nice view of Sokehs Rock through glass-louvered windows. It showcases Pohnpeian dancing on Saturday nights.

Sei Restaurant (☎ 320 2403; PO Box 254, Kolonia; buffet US\$10; ☞ lunch & dinner) With its wood-panelled floors and ceiling, this barnlike space is certainly arresting. It's a popular meeting place and social space, not least for its all-you-can-eat, serve-your-own buffet, stuffed with seafood, fried goods and all kinds of BBQ meats.

DRINKING

Sakau, the local narcotic drink, is made from *Piper methysticum*, the roots of a pepper shrub; to prepare it, pepper roots are pounded on a stone and the pulp is squeezed through hibiscus bark. The juice is then mixed with water and, traditionally, poured into a coconut shell, which is passed around. Every neighbourhood has a *sakau* bar, though most are small, casual and inconspicuous; mostly they're simple thatched-roof, open-air structures in someone's backyard.

Unlike boisterous, temperamental alcohol drinkers, *sakau* drinkers are quiet and relaxed. They generally sit in a circle sharing stories, passing the *sakau* bowl and gradually falling into quiet contemplation (see the boxed text, opposite).

The bars can be a bit hard to find – ask the locals (who always know).

Jungle Bar (Map p111; Kolonia) You can get booze here if you wish, but at night you might feel left out; that's when *sakau* rules. Mellow music, peaceful staff and a huge, open-air seating area ensure everyone's grooving on the pepper-root tip.

Tattooed Irishman (Map p110; ☎ 320 2797; Village Hotel) Rip into some island-style cocktails at the Village Hotel's large open-air, thatched gazebo. It's out of town, but well worth the effort if you happen to catch a spine-chilling Pohnpeian sunset over the lagoon.

FOUR CUPS OF SAKAU & A PACK OF FERAL DOGS *Simon Sellars*

As a travel writer, my job is to research local culture. So in Pohnpei I did what Pohnpeians do – I got bent; I drank *sakau*.

Sakau is like kava from Fiji or Vanuatu, only much stronger. In ancient times, the drinking of *sakau* had religious significance and it was usually only consumed when the high chief was present.

At Kolonia's Jungle Bar (opposite), a mellow, open-air place, I ordered *sakau* and was given what looked like a mud milkshake.

I took in the scene. By the pool table, old and young men sat quietly, watching a game in progress. There was no real conversation; everyone was calm and still. Every five minutes or so a young guy would appear and offer each man the *sakau* bowl in turn. I loved the communal aspect of this ritual, but felt wistful that I wouldn't be able to join in.

After a short while, the young lady who'd served me came over.

'Your first time with *sakau*? I'll show you. It's simple; just close your eyes when you drink...'

I did and I discovered that *sakau* has a clammy consistency from the hibiscus, not as gritty as mud, but close. But it wasn't too unpleasant.

We chatted for a while; I finished my cup and ordered another. *Sakau* is a real creeper; my tongue and lips went numb and I began to feel benevolence and wellbeing. All the stresses of my trip melted away as I sat there listening to the reggae on the sound system. My new friend told me the band was Black Shadow, from Chuuk. No drums, just loping bass runs and fuzzed-out guitar, with a mournful, high-voiced man singing over the top. I agreed it was perfect for *sakau*.

On the third cup, just like the guys around the pool table, I fell into silent contemplation. Further conversation seemed unnecessary; I felt like I could read minds.

FW Christian, who researched Nan Madol in the 1890s, wrote that 'after four cups of *sakau*, one leg struggles south while the other is marching due north'; I was on my fourth cup when I decided to leave. Like Christian, I was soon to test the duality of man: my body went one way, my mind another.

I got completely lost trying to find my way back to the hotel, following what was supposed to be a simple 20-minute route. It took me an hour to get home; I ended up in Porakiet village at 1am, with puzzled locals wondering what the hell I was doing out so late.

I couldn't explain and I didn't ask directions because I had this powerful determination to get myself home, to try and solve the dilemma of why I was lost. That single-minded focus was from the *sakau*, I think, which was great, but the fuzzy logic was also from the *sakau*, so there was a trade-off.

Then the inevitable pack of feral dogs chased me, before a flash storm almost flattened me to the ground and washed me away. I gave up and asked a kind lady the way home.

Back at the hotel, I looked at a map and saw that I'd walked past the turnoff to my place at least four times, going around in circles. *Sakau*, it would seem, fries the most basic neurological functions.

When I woke the next morning, it was from the deepest sleep – like I'd been buried alive.

And that's *sakau*. Nothing more to say, really.

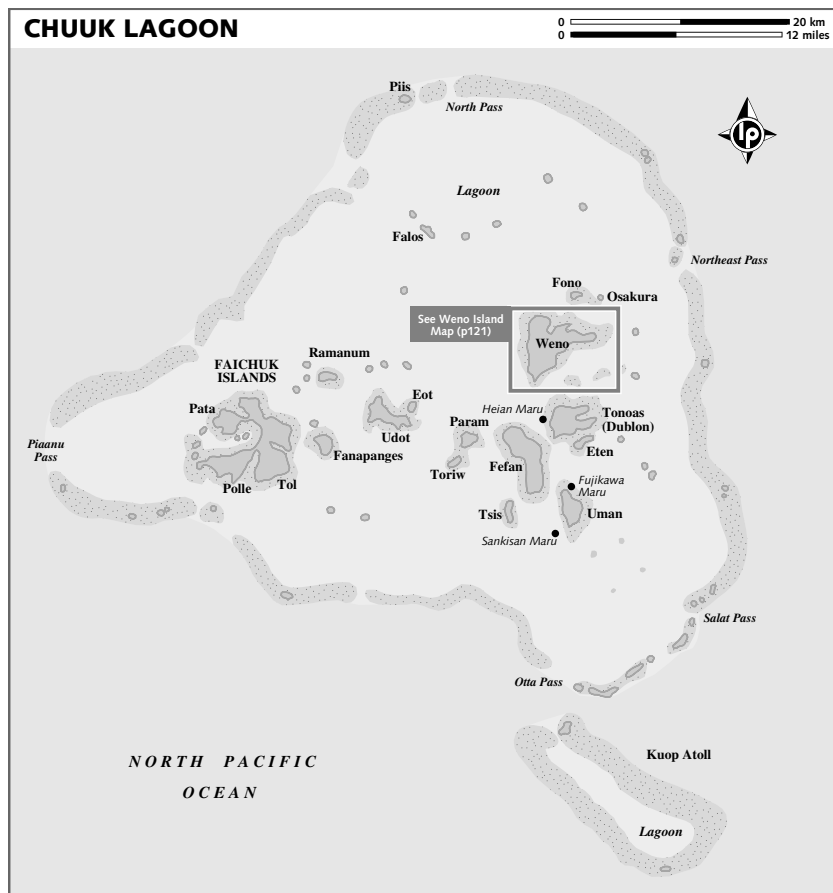
SHOPPING

Kapingamarangi islanders make Pohnpei's fine handicrafts. Most common are carved mangrove or ironwood dolphins, sharks with real shark teeth, turtles, and outrigger-canoe models with woven sails. There are also manta rays and dolphins carved from ivory palm nut. A few places in Porakiet village sell handicrafts; try the Carving Spot Handicraft Shop and the Kapingamarangi Gift Shop, and ask the locals for advice. Traditional Micronesian handicrafts are sold at Joy Restaurant (opposite).

CHUUK

pop 53,395 / area 127 sq km

Chuuk is colourful, lively and rough around the edges. Houses are commonly painted in several bright contrasting colours, and on hot days village women sit bare-breasted in streams doing laundry and young children run around naked. Speedboats zip back and forth across the lagoon and from Weno you can watch the sun set behind the Faichuk Islands, often with a brilliant light show.



Chuuk's ace in the hole is its sunken war wrecks, which attract devoted divers from all over the world. An entire Japanese fleet rests on the lagoon floor – a bloody moment in time captured forever in an underwater museum (save for the creeping rust). Together, these wrecks represent the largest naval loss in history.

ORIENTATION

Weno is the main island. Villages skirt the outer edges, and the district centre, government offices and airport are on the northwest side. A coastal road extends most of the way around Weno, broken by a narrow gap of mangrove swamp between the tiny villages of Nukunap and Winipis on the east side.

INFORMATION

Bank of Guam (Map p122; ☎ 330 2567; PO Box 69, Weno) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Chuuk visitor information centre (Map p122; ☎ 330 4133; cvb@mail.fm; PO Box FQ, Weno; ☎ 8am–5pm)

FSM Telecommunications (Map p122; Internet access per hr US\$4; ☎ 24 hr) Telephone calls can be made here.

Hospital (Map p122; ☎ 330 2216)

Post office (Map p122; Weno)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Catch them at the right time and the Chuukese can be friendly, but you should know that Chuuk has a reputation. High unemployment rates, economic malaise and a general dissatisfaction among young men mean that trouble is never far away.

Male and female travellers alike should not venture out after dark, even in a car.

If you must go out at night, do so at your own risk; travellers tell numerous tales of raucous bars becoming bottle-hurling scenes in the blink of an eye. Stick to the tamer bars at the Truk Stop hotel and Blue Lagoon Resort.

Don't accept lifts in vehicles or boats from strangers and don't hitchhike under any circumstances.

Foreign women walking alone will probably be subject to constant verbal harassment; take a taxi or walk around in a group.

TRANSPORT

See p135 for details of international flights to Chuuk. Weno's airport is smack in the centre of town. Taxis wait out front, but most hotels provide airport transfers if given notice.

Commuter boats and private speedboats regularly journey between the main lagoon islands and Weno. Note that these depart from the islands for Weno in the morning,

leaving Weno in the afternoon for the return journey; this makes it difficult to plan a day trip. You'll therefore need to plan an overnight stay, and this could be unwise, considering the Chuukese way.

Ask at the visitor information centre for advice and help in maybe finding a sponsor. If this is all too much, try the dive shops (p124) for tour information.

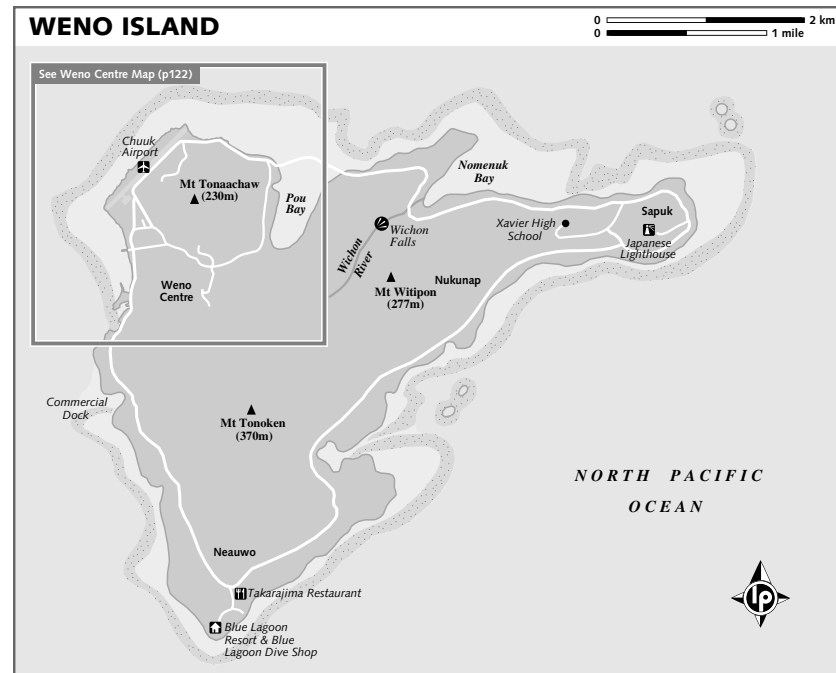
For Weno car rentals, try **Chuuk Star** (☎ 330 2040), **J & R Rentals** (☎ 330 2215), the **Kurassa Hotel** (Map p122; ☎ 330 4415) or the **Truk Stop hotel** (Map p122; ☎ 330 4232).

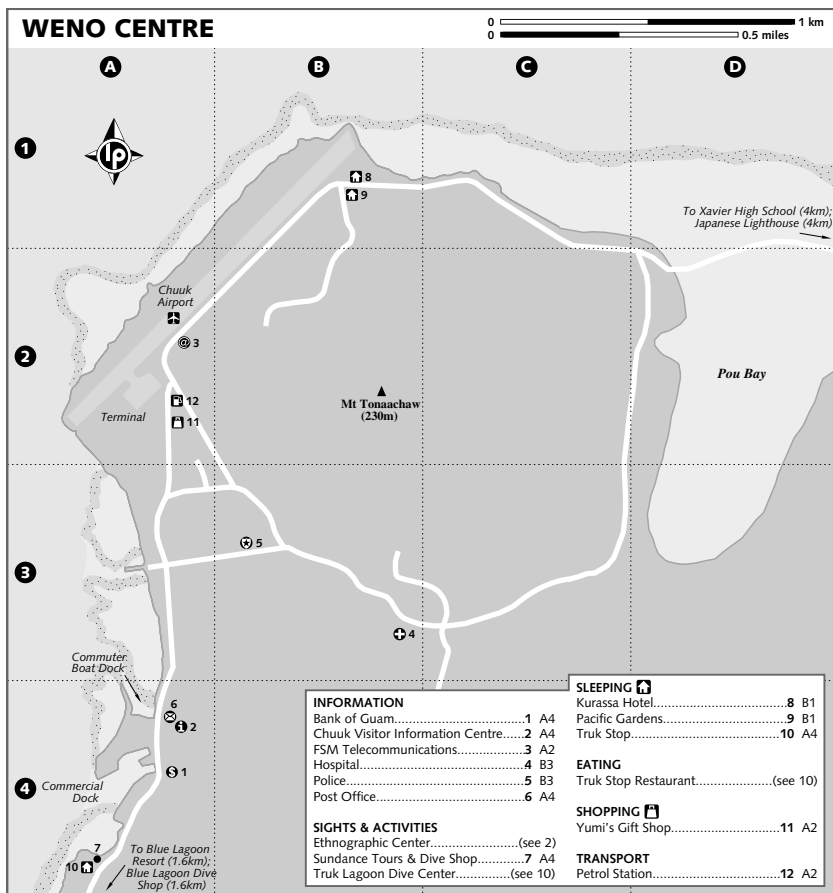
WENO

pop 15,000

Weno, the second-largest island in the lagoon, is Chuuk's capital and commercial centre. It certainly has a pretty setting, ringed by mangrove forests, but as one of Micronesia's most densely populated islands, it also has its share of pollution problems, including sewage that runs into the lagoon and streets littered with trash.

Many outer islanders come to Weno in search of job opportunities, of which there are





few for those without political connections; they end up living in poverty.

Ethnographic Center

The **center** (Map p122; ☎ 330 4133; cvb@mail.fm; PO Box FQ, Weno; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) is a small one-room museum at the tourist office. It features love sticks (see p125), outrigger-canoe models and a few other interesting traditional items, such as a coconut grater and a *ulong*, a special food bowl that was used to present the season's first harvest to the high chief. There are also artefacts from the lagoon shipwrecks, and a display of photos taken during the two-day US bombing assault on the Japanese fleet.

Mt Tonaachaw

When the legendary Sowukachaw arrived on Chuuk, he stuck a lump of basalt rock on the summit of Mt Tonaachaw (Map p122) and built a meeting house from which he ruled all of Chuuk Lagoon.

The steep-sided 230m mountain is the backdrop for the airport and harbour. A trail goes to the top of Mt Tonaachaw from the Civic Action Team (CAT) camp. It's about 30 minutes to the summit, where there's a Japanese bunker, one tree and good panoramic views.

Chuukese are wary of climbing this mountain because Neawacha, the ghost of an old woman who lives there, is believed to have the power of curses.

Xavier High School

East of the airport, the Jesuit-run Xavier High School (Map p121) opened in 1953. Originally the site of a German chapel, the land was taken by the Japanese in 1940 and a fortresslike wartime communications centre was constructed. The main building, with 600mm reinforced-concrete walls and vaultlike steel doors and windows, miraculously survived two direct hits by US bombers. Visitors can climb the roof for a panoramic view of Chuuk Lagoon and walk around the grounds, provided they don't disturb classes.

Japanese Lighthouse

Even better than the view from Xavier is the one from the Japanese lighthouse (Map p121) in Sapuk. The lighthouse, which was built in the early 1930s, sits atop Newech Hill at an elevation of 117m, but it's on private property; someone may ask you for money. Park your car where the road briefly plateaus at a house, and walk the rest of the way up; as at Xavier, the road can be very muddy, rocky and treacherous even with a 4WD car.

ISLANDS IN CHUUK LAGOON

Tonoas (Dublon)

pop 3000

Both the Germans and the Japanese made Tonoas their administrative centre, but intense US bombings left the Japanese military headquarters in ruins. Most WWII relics are on the island's western side; seeing them generally costs cash.

Overgrown vegetation in Sapou village partly conceals a ruined city. A former

Japanese naval hospital can be explored. Driving counterclockwise from Sapou to the southern side of Dublon, you'll see a large Japanese dome-like **concrete bunker**; the protruding iron pipe served as an air vent. Ahead, take the road's right fork to a fortified **Japanese building** with heavy metal doors and windows and, further on, an old **Japanese seaplane base**. Other island sites include a small **Japanese memorial** and a massive **Japanese cement tunnel**.

Eten

The Japanese used Chuukese labour to tear down Eten's mountaintops and turn Eten into an airfield. There's a massive two-storey **concrete structure** on the island, which islanders say was hit by 15 to 20 bombs; one room is, amazingly, still intact. There's a **demolished tower** and a **big gun** on top of the hill, as well as **wrecked planes** in the water around the island.

Other Islands

Fefan (Map p120) is known for its fresh produce and high-quality basketry woven of banana and hibiscus fibres. Pieces of pottery found in archaeological digs on Fefan date back 1500 years.

The **Faichuk Islands** (Map p120) contain one-third of Chuuk's population. Tol, the largest and most populated island, is a one-hour boat ride from Weno and has Chuuk's tallest peak, 443m Mt Tumuitai. Warning: the islanders here have a reputation for being rough and rowdy.

The **Picnic Islands** are numerous small, uninhabited coral islets scattered around

THAT'S THE POWER OF LOVE

Believers say Chuukese magic is an extremely potent force and they take it very seriously indeed. It can surface in many forms: as a curse, as a love potion, as a way to remove evil spirits or as a form of protection. Satawan Atoll is said to have the strongest magic.

Perfumed love potions, called *omung*, may contain such exotica as centipede teeth mixed with coconut oil; if a beautiful woman falls in love with a plain-looking man, people will joke and say he used *omung*.

This power spreads all the way to Yap, where the locals tell of the Legend of the Ghost from Chuuk, who supposedly haunts Yap. The ghost was a local magician who disguised himself as a handsome Chuukese. He invented a love potion made from crushed stingray tail, black ants and centipede legs; he would give this to beautiful women, who would accompany him into the forest for a 'delightful romp in the bush'. Once there, the ghost's appearance would turn hideous and he would eat the women.

The moral? Beauty can hide evil, probably. Don't be seduced by appearances.

the lagoon, many of them with white-sand beaches and good snorkelling, like **Falos** (Map p120).

OUTER ISLANDS

Outside Chuuk Lagoon are the far-flung Mortlocks (southeast), Hall Islands (north) and Western Islands (nearest to Yap's outer islands). All are flat coral formations; some are mere wisps of sand. All are traditional – a day's work might include fishing, cultivating the taro patch or preparing copra.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

They say Chuuk Lagoon is the world's finest wreck-diving site: at the bottom rest about 60 Japanese ships, including oil tankers, submarines, cruisers, tugboats and cargo ships, and scores of US and Japanese planes. See p75 for more details.

The ships lie just as they sank in 1944: some are upright, some are intact, and some are in pieces strewn across the lagoon floor. Each is a separate time capsule, their holds full of guns, trucks and fighter planes; the dining areas littered with dishes, silverware and sake bottles; the skeletal remains of the doomed crews 'buried' at sea.

The wrecks have become artificial reefs for hundreds of species of vividly coloured corals, sponges and anemones, which have attached themselves to the metal; they also attract large schools of fish. The water is warm, about 29°C, and visibility is generally 15m to 30m.

The largest wreck in the lagoon is the **Heian Maru** (Map p120), a 163m passenger and cargo ship lying on its port side at 12m to 33m. Divers can see the ship's name and telegraph mount on the bow, as well as large propellers, periscopes and a torpedo.

The **Fujikawa Maru** (Map p120), an aircraft ferry that landed upright in 12m to 27m of water, is one of the most popular dives. The main deck is 18m below the surface, while the hold, which contains four Zero fighters, is at 27m.

The **Sankisan Maru** (Map p120), with excellent soft-coral formations, is upright at 15m to 30m and still has a cargo of trucks, machine guns and ammunition.

DIVE SHOPS

To keep souvenir hunters at bay, Chuuk Lagoon's wrecks have been declared an underwater historical park and they can't be visited without a guide. You'll need a State Diving Permit (US\$30); your shop can organise this.

Blue Lagoon Dive Shop (Map p121; ☎ 330 2796; www.truk-lagoon-dive.com; Blue Lagoon Resort) One-/two-/three-tank dives US\$65/100/130; night dives US\$70; outer reef dives with two tanks US\$120; snorkelling trips US\$65; boat charter including diving US\$665; land tours one/two to six/seven to 12 people US\$80/40/25; Jeep/Fanamu Island trip including overnight stay and BBQ meal US\$120 per person.

Sundance Tours & Dive Shop (Map p122; ☎ 330 4234; sundance@mail.fm; PO Box 85, Weno)

Truk Lagoon Dive Center (Map p122; ☎ 330 4232; www.trukstophotel.com) Two-tank boat dives US\$95, third dive US\$35; night dive US\$50. Boat tours, island tours, shopping tours, snorkelling tours and fishing tours also available. Rates on request.

DIVE BOATS

These are good options for divers who don't want to put up with Weno and its attendant hassles.

SS Thorfinn (Seaward Holidays Micronesia; ☎ 330 4032; www.thorfinn.net; weekly occupancies from US\$1295) A 58m vessel with 11 rooms.

Truk Odyssey (☎ 330 2727; www.trukodyssey.com; weekly occupancies from US\$2395) A 40m liveaboard.

Snorkelling

The waters of Chuuk Lagoon are clear and calm, so you don't have to be an experienced diver to take a look at its underwater attractions; some wrecks are about a metre under the surface. Boat trips for snorkellers usually include a visit to the **Dainihino Maru**, a small coral-encrusted transport ship that lies on its starboard side in 12m of water off Uman. Other wrecks visited are a Zero fighter in shallow waters off Eten and the **Susuki Maru**, a sub-chaser off the coast of Tonoas, with its deck about 3m underwater.

See above for dive-shop rates.

CHUUK FOR CHILDREN

Adults have a hard enough time on Chuuk, let alone kids. If you're not a diver, let alone a grown up, there won't be a lot to see and do here. Parents be warned: you won't find any big stores, so make sure you have all your kiddie-related necessities before you arrive.

TOURS

People come to Chuuk to dive. On Weno, there's very little to see; what there is, you can easily do yourself. The dive shops listed on opposite run tours, sometimes to the other islands.

SLEEPING

Avoid camping, for safety reasons.

If you want to stay in the outer islands, you'd best contact the visitor information centre (p120).

Blue Lagoon Resort (Map p121; ☎ 330 2727; www.bluelagoondiveresort.com; PO Box 340, Weno; s/d from US\$125/135; ☎) This resort is Weno's only beachside hotel. Pleasantly landscaped amid a beautiful coconut grove, it has well-furnished rooms in two-storey wood buildings, each with a balcony facing the lagoon. Given the safety situation on Chuuk, this may be the best place for divers – you don't have to drive anywhere.

Truk Stop (Map p122; ☎ 330 2701; www.trukstophotel.com; PO Box 546, Weno; s/d from US\$95/105; ☎) This popular 23-room hotel has spacious, comfortable and clean rooms with two double beds, minifridges and large showers with good water pressure; in Chuuk, you must be thankful for small mercies. Choose from standard or ocean-view rooms.

Kurassa Hotel (Map p122; ☎ 330 4415; PO Box 64, Weno; kurassa@mail.fm; r US\$48; ☎) These nine one-bedroom and studio apartments are pleasant and safe, if a bit rough around the edges. All rooms have kitchen facilities, a TV and VCR, and there's a store downstairs if you get peckish.

Pacific Gardens (Map p122; ☎ 330 2606; PO Box 494, Weno; r from US\$55; ☎) This 10-room hotel

has units that feature a small separate area with a table, sink and refrigerator (but no cooking facilities), plus a small bedroom with a double and a single bed. This place is adequate; don't expect miracles. There's a restaurant and bar downstairs.

Falos Beach Resort (☎ 330 2606; tpgardenmrvb@mail.fm; PO Box 494, Weno, Falos Island; r US\$45) Located on Falos Island, these simple concrete, tin-roofed cottages have linoleum floors, electric lights and futons on wooden bases. Ask for the free-standing cottages with screened, louvred windows on all four walls to catch the breeze. The toilets and showers are outside and shared. The resort can organise a boat for you.

EATING

A Chuukese speciality is *oppot*, made by filling a pit with alternating layers of ripe, cut breadfruit and banana leaves, then covering the top with rocks and leaving it for months – even years. It smells rotten, but preserved breadfruit is highly valued and has traditionally served as an important staple, feeding islanders through long canoe journeys or during months when fresh breadfruit was not in season. You won't find it in restaurants, but if you're brave you can ask a local.

Blue Lagoon Resort (Map p121; ☎ 330 2727; mains US\$8-17; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The ambience is A-OK here, given that you'll be enjoying terrific lagoon-side views of the Faichuks, Fefan and Tonoas. It has some Japanese staples and good steak options, plus terrific tuna dishes and various pastas.

Truk Stop Restaurant (Map p122; ☎ 330 2701; mains US\$9-18; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place

SLENDER STICKS OF LOVE

In the days of thatched houses, love sticks were used by males to get a date for the evening.

These slender sticks of mangrove wood were intricately notched and carved in a design unique to its owner; a young man would at some stage show his love stick to the object of his desire, so she could then recognise the carving at the appropriate time.

If all went well, the suitor would wait until the young woman had retired for the night and then push the love stick in through the side of the thatched house, entangling it in her long hair. She would be woken by his gentle tugging, feel the carving to determine who was outside and, if tempted, would sneak out into the night for a secret rendezvous.

It seems like a recipe for disaster; imagine poking the young woman in the eye or tangling the stick in her mother's hair instead. When thatched houses went out of fashion, so did love sticks.

These days, replicas make popular souvenirs.

YAPESE ETIQUETTE

Exploring Yap requires a grasp of Yapese etiquette. Once you step off the road anywhere in Yap (except for some parts of Colonia), you're on private property. Even some of the stone pathways through villages are private, and walking along them is like cutting across someone's backyard. Yapese try to avoid entering a village other than their own once the sun has set.

Officially you need to get permission and sometimes a guide to visit most villages. In reality, the Yapese will probably understand that foreigners don't know the rules, as long as you're considerate and don't overstep the bounds.

You could try exploring on your own, asking people along the way for directions and permission when appropriate. Smiles go a long way in Yap. In a village you should greet everyone you see so it doesn't look as though you're sneaking around. Be prepared to back off when it's obvious you're intruding, and be sure you always ask permission before snapping someone's picture. Yapese don't like to be stared at or to have things pointed at them, so video cameras are especially distasteful.

To the Yapese, not asking permission is an insult, but they are a very generous people and if you do ask, they'll most likely let you go nearly anywhere and see almost anything you want.

serves the island's only pizza and has a pleasant lagoon view. It's a pretty meaty menu (steaks etc), but the seafood is excellent; get a load of the lobster thermidor if they have it.

Also:

Takarajima Restaurant (Map p121; mains US\$7-28; ☎ lunch & dinner) Weno's best Japanese food.

SHOPPING

Souvenirs include items such as love sticks (see p125), hibiscus-fibre fans, wood-carvings, wooden masks, baskets, seashells, and shell jewellery.

Yumi's Gift Shop (Map p122; ☎ 330 3585; PO Box 87), opposite the airport, has a wide selection of quality handicrafts.

Sundance Tours (p124) and the Blue Lagoon Resort (p125) also sell some handicrafts.

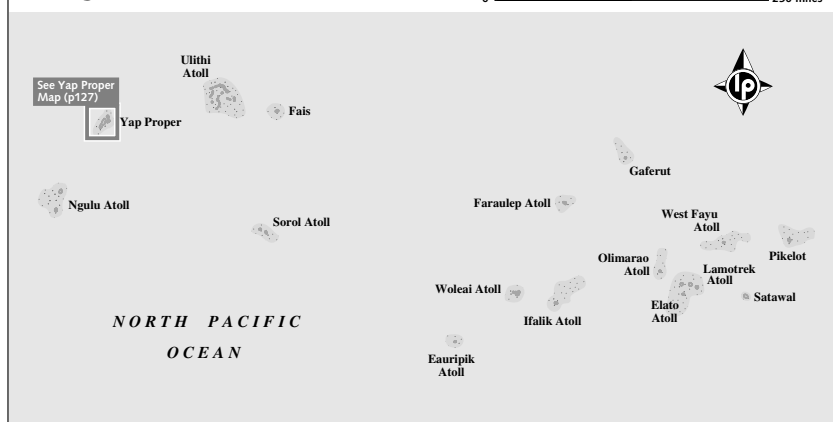
YAP

pop 11,241 / area 120 sq km

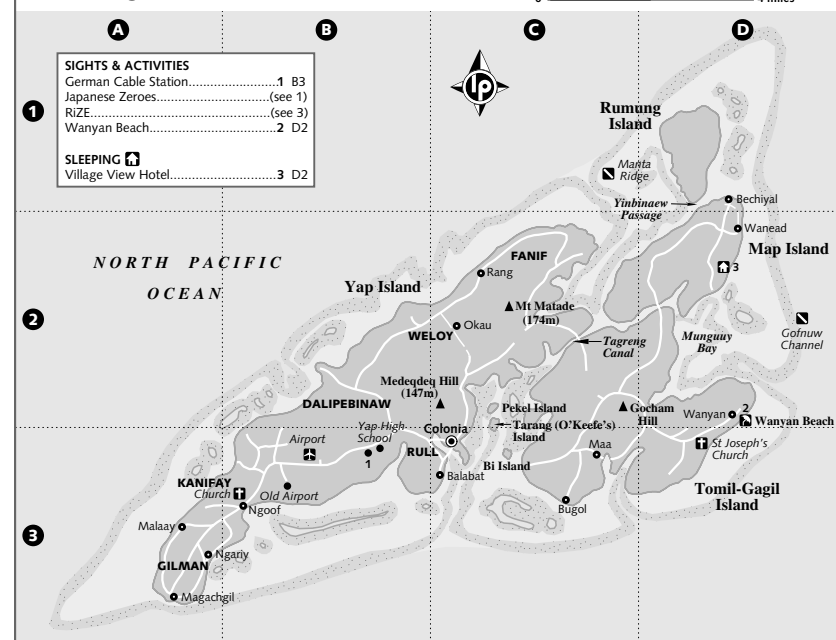
Yap, the land of giant stone money, is a wondrous place, one that will leave a deep impression on you for years to come.

This is the most traditional district in the whole of the FSM, a place where the caste system survives and village chiefs still hold as much political clout as elected public officials.

YAP STATE



YAP PROPER



It's a place where, when you step off the plane, you'll catch your first glimpse of men and boys wearing bright-coloured loincloths, or of Yapese women wearing only woven hibiscus skirts, greeting incoming passengers. And everyone, including the very official-looking customs officers, will have a cheek bulging with betel nut (see p132; apparently the dirt floors of the old airport were so deeply stained with betel-nut juice that the concrete floors of the new terminal were painted betel-nut red to cover up).

Out in the villages, connected by centuries-old stone footpaths, *faluw* (men's houses) can be found, constructed in the elaborate, traditional style of wood, thatch, rope and bamboo.

The people love their culture and they'll love you, too, asking only that you tread with respect.

ORIENTATION

The major islands of Yap, Map and Tomil-Gagil are all tightly clustered and connected by bridges. Yap Island, with the airport, is the westernmost and largest island, with

half of Yap Proper's land area and two-thirds of its people. Rumung is separated from the rest of Yap Proper by Yimbinaew Passage and can only be reached by boat.

The island's main paved road begins at the airport, curves through Colonia, and continues through Tomil to the north-east end of Map. Most other roads on the island are packed dirt, though they're in fairly good condition.

INFORMATION

Since the Bank of Hawaii closed its doors in 2002, many businesses have stopped taking credit cards. Make sure you bring enough cash with you; there are no ATMs on Yap.

Bank of the FSM (Map p129; Colonia) Does cash advances and changes US-dollar travellers cheques.

FSM Telecommunications (Map p129; Internet per hr US\$4; ☎ 24 hr) Long-distance telephone calls can be made here.

Net Café (Map p129; Room F & G, Yap Market Square; Internet access per hr US\$4)

Post office (Map p129; Colonia) On the northern side of Chamorro Bay.

HIS MAJESTY O'KEEFE

The most colourful character of Yap's 19th-century history was David 'His Majesty' O'Keefe, a shipwrecked Irish-American who washed ashore in 1871. Near death, he was nursed back to health by the Yapese and spent the next 30 years of his life on the islands.

Where the Germans had failed in getting the Yapese to produce copra in quantity, O'Keefe saw a golden opportunity. He noted that the colourful cloth and trinkets that traders used to entice other Pacific islanders raised little curiosity among the Yapese, who stubbornly preferred traditional hibiscus clothing and grass skirts.

Realising that the enormous stone money the Yapese quarried in distant Palau offered more leverage as a medium of exchange, O'Keefe decided to get into the stone-money trade. He went off to Hong Kong to buy a Chinese junk, then returned to Yap and began making runs down to Palau to pick up newly quarried stone money. Yapese chiefs paid for the stone money with copra, and O'Keefe soon came to dominate Yap's copra trade.

O'Keefe's Irish temper and penchant for feuding with colonial administrators made him legendary among the Yapese.

In 1901 he disappeared at sea; his former home on Tarang Island, in Tomil Harbor, is now in the Register of National Historic Places, though only a couple of bricks and a stairway remain.

Public hospital (Map p129; ☎ 350 3446)

Yap visitor information centre (Map p129;

☎ 350 2298; yvb@mail.fm; PO Box 988, Colonia;

🕒 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-4.30pm)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

See p135 for details of international flights to Yap.

Pacific Missionary Aviation (PMA; ☎ 350 2360) flies a nine-passenger plane to Ulithi, Fais and Woleai (from US\$172; usually Monday and Friday).

The field-trip ship *Micro Spirit* does a (approximately) 14-day trip monthly between Yap Proper and all populated outer islands. Arrange permits to disembark and book through the **Yap State Transportation Field Trip Service** (Map p129; ☎ 350 2240).

Getting Around

For car rentals try **7-D** (Map p129; ☎ 350 2566), **PBC** (Map p129; ☎ 350 2266) or the **ESA Hotel** (Map p129; ☎ 350 2139).

Yap's taxis cost up to 75c around Colonia and US\$3 to the airport.

COLONIA

pop 1100

The state capital is the only part of Yap that's the least bit modern, although it's really just a small village with a decidedly rustic feel.

Colonia wraps around **Chamorro Bay**, offering sea views most everywhere (the bay was named for the labourers from Saipan

who helped build the German's transpacific cable station).

If you've a yen for exploring, go on a walk to the stone-money bank in the nearby village of Balabat (opposite).

Note the Japanese **torii** (pillared gate) near the state legislature.

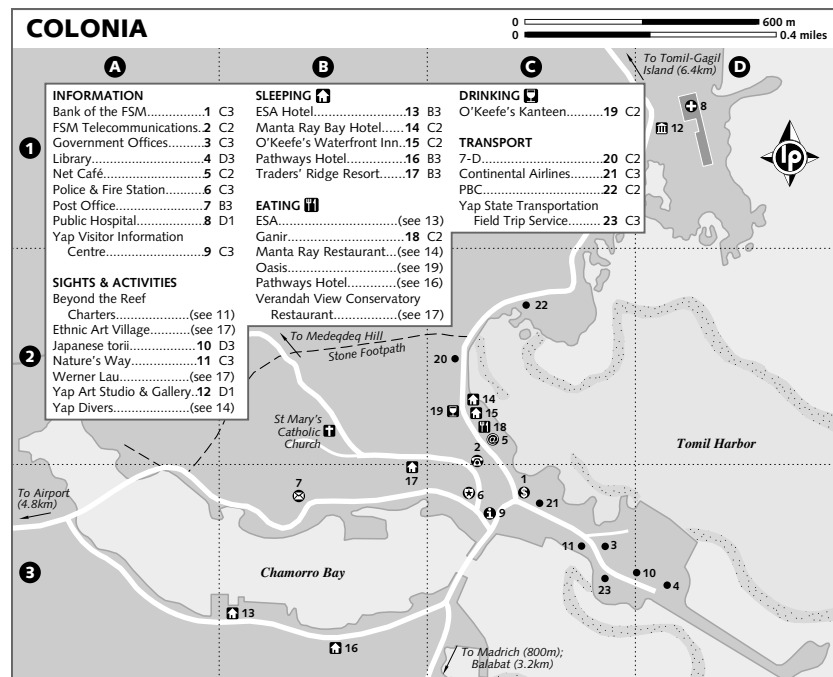
A shaded traditional **stone footpath** starts opposite the waterfront, south of the former Ocean View Hotel. When the path splits, take the left fork and you'll come out to the paved road just above the Catholic school.

Turn right and go up the road for about 6m. A second path heads down to Chamorro Bay; it's not as well-lined with stones as the first, but it does offer some glimpses of taro patches and village houses.

Ethnic Art Village

Located at the Traders' Ridge Resort, the Ethnic Art Village does a great job of celebrating and preserving indigenous art. Here, village elders have been invited to teach their craftsmanship and techniques to younger artists; research is conducted to determine the exact form of original idols and to uncover what natural pigments were used before Western contact.

Yapese artisans live in thatched homes in the village and work on their craft in an open-air shelter, hand-carving objects from materials like breadfruit and hibiscus; you can buy examples of these in the excellent gift shop. The arts village also stages Yapese dance performances (US\$50) on Sunday at



5pm in its amphitheatre, where traditional Yapese buildings have been reconstructed. You can also witness stone-money-carrying exhibitions and sample local food.

Yap Art Studio & Gallery

This terrific little **gallery** (☎ 350 4180; www.yapeseart.com; Colonia; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) showcases the work of local artists; in essence, it's an art cooperative, where you can view and buy watercolours, carvings and weavings direct from the source.

BALABAT VILLAGE

The walk to Balabat (Map p127), about 3.2km, is a convenient way to see a traditional men's house and **rai** (stone money) bank. The road starts at Colonia's petrol station near the bridge. You'll pass **Madrich**, once the site of a Spanish trading station, and continue along the waterfront to the Rull municipal office, where the road is lined with **rai**. Take the road curving to the right, and 300m along look on the left for a wide dirt road. It's just a couple of minutes down to more **rai** and a seaside **faluw**. The main

road ends at two raised stone platforms used for community gatherings.

GERMAN CABLE STATION & JAPANESE ZEROES

Beyond Colonia, it's recommended you hire a guide to get the most out of Yap; many sights are hidden away on dirt roads.

One-and-a-half kilometres east of the airport, on an unmarked dirt road leading to the left, is the old **German Cable Station**, built in 1905, that linked Shanghai through Guam and the Philippines; nearby are two **Japanese Zeroes**, their wings surprisingly intact.

OKAU VILLAGE

This village (Map p127) in Weloy has one of Yap's best **faluw** and **rai** banks at the end of a very pleasant stone footpath.

From Colonia head west towards the airport, but instead of turning left with the main paved road, take the right fork onto the wide dirt road, 1½km from the west-side bridge on Chamorro Bay. When the road forks again, bear right, continuing on the wider road. The stone pathway,

STONE MONEY

Legend has it that the ancient navigator Anagumang set sail in search of the ideal stone to be used as Yapese currency. He found it on Palau's Rock Islands, in the form of hard crystalline limestone that the Yapese then quarried into huge flat discs. Holes were carved in the centre so logs could be slipped through, and the stones were then lugged down to barges and towed by canoe 402km to Yap.

With their weighty cargo, entire expeditions were sometimes lost in storms at sea. The most valuable stones were therefore not necessarily the largest, but those that were transported at the highest cost of human lives. These stones commonly bore the names of the lost mariners.

Stone money, which the Yapese call *rai*, can range up to 3½m in diameter and weigh as much as five tonnes. The Japanese civilian government counted 13,281 coins in 1929.

Most *rai* is kept in 'banks' lined up along village pathways. The money is not moved, even when ownership changes. *Rai* remains in use today for some traditional exchanges, although the US dollar settles most transactions.

just over 7km from the airport road, starts on the right opposite a stone platform and just before two small houses and a bridge. The large **pebai**, about 10 minutes down the pathway, is built on a raised stone platform. Nearby are several thick **rai**.

WANYAN

To get to Wanyan, on the eastern side of Tomil-Gagil Island, bear left at the fork 1½km after the academy, on the road paralleling the power lines. Yap's largest piece of *rai* is on Rumung Island, but as it's closed to visitors (except for Traders' Ridge tours; see p132) you'll have to settle for number two, in the centre of Wanyan village. Past the *faluw* are two huge *rai* standing along the ocean side of the road; the piece on the left is Yap's second largest.

One of Yap's most accessible beaches is **Wanyan Beach** (Map p127), at the end of the road, with thatched picnic shelters, restrooms and showers. Swimming is best at high tide; kayaks can be rented. You'll have to pay a couple of dollars to the owner for access.

BECHIYAL

This friendly beachside village used to contain a low-key cultural centre, until Super-typhoon Sudal destroyed it in 2004. The swimming is good if you waded out for 10 minutes. Visitors are welcome to use the beach in front of the men's house, though the beaches just beyond the village are even nicer and more secluded.

Bechiyal's **faluw** survived the typhoon and is one of the island's oldest. Inside are dried turtle skulls and a carved wooden figure that

represents the *mispil*, which in times past was a woman captured from a neighbouring village and used as the *faluw* mistress.

You can still camp here (US\$5), and at the time of writing there was talk of reviving the serving of traditional meals; contact the visitor information centre (p128) for all details.

To get to Bechiyal, drive to the end of the Map road (take the left-hand fork); park and head across the log footbridge. The 1½km path passes through two traditional villages, with many *rai* along the way. Continue straight across when you intersect with another road.

OUTER ISLANDS

Yap's outer islands are home to some of the planet's most isolated people; it's believed that the islands were settled independently of Yap Proper. Most outer islanders live as they have for centuries, wearing *thu* and *lava-lavas*, living in thatched huts and subsisting on fish and farming. Some elderly men still have elaborate body tattoos.

Ulithi Atoll (Map p127) has the most land and the most people; it's also the most 'developed' of the outer islands.

A close second in land size and population, **Woleai Atoll** (Map p127) was fortified by the Japanese, and wrecked ships and planes, old tanks, bunkers, field guns, and monuments surround its islands.

Fais (Map p127) is a single island of raised limestone with a partial fringing reef, sandy beaches, cliffs and sea caves. Its women are known for their skilled weaving of *lava-lavas*.

Unless you're staying at the Ulithi Adventure Resort Inn (p133), you'll need to make a request to the **Council of Tamol** (☎ 350 2343; PO Box 42, Colonia) at least one month before visiting the outer islands. If the island's chief approves your visit, you will get an authorised pass stating your length of stay.

When you land the pass must be presented to the island chief, along with a visitor fee of US\$20. Bring cigarettes or canned food for your host family.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Yap has good diving: virgin reefs with excellent coral, vertical walls, sea caves, channel drifts, schools of grey sharks and barracuda, sea turtles, and a couple of shipwrecks. The reef off Gilman at the southern tip of Yap Proper slopes gently with extensive branching corals, huge lettuce corals and spectacular coral heads.

Yap's most novel attraction, however, is its **manta rays**; these gentle creatures, with their wingspans of up to 3.6m, often come close enough to brush you with their wingtips, swimming through the channel as divers cling to a ledge about 9m below the surface. The rays, which are cleaned by parasitic wrasses in the channel, are an awesome sight, especially when they open their wide mouths.

From December through to February, divers track rays at **Manta Ridge** in Miil Channel; in summer the rays move to **Gof-nuw Channel**, at the northeast end of Tomil-Gagil, an interesting dive that often has sleeping sharks.

DIVE SHOPS

Beyond the Reef Charters (Map p129; ☎ 350 3483; www.diveyap.com; PO Box 609, Yap) One-/two-tank dives US\$60/99, third tank extra US\$35; night dive US\$60; snorkelling excursion US\$45; half-/full-day fishing charter US\$99/175.

Dive Ulithi (☎ 350 2360; www.diveulithi.com; Falalop) One-tank dive US\$75; snorkelling boat tour US\$55; boat rider US\$25; kayak tours (rates on request); Falalop Island and village tour US\$25.

Nature's Way (Map p129; ☎ 350 3407; www.naturesway.fm; PO Box 238, Colonia) One-/two-tank dives including lunch US\$70/105, third tank extra US\$35; night dive US\$70; beach picnic and snorkelling by car US\$40; boat snorkelling US\$50; mangrove boat tour with snorkelling US\$70; introductory snorkelling US\$70.

RiZE (Map p127; ☎ 350 2031; Village View Hotel) One-/two-tank dives US\$60/95, third dive US\$35.

Werner Lau (Map p129; ☎ 350 6000; Traders' Ridge Resort) One-/two-tank dives US\$50/99, third tank extra US\$35; night dive US\$65.

Yap Divers (Map p129; ☎ 350 2300; Manta Ray Bay Hotel) One-/two tank dive US\$65/106, third tank extra US\$38; night dive US\$65; guided snorkelling US\$48; half-/full-day fishing from US\$270/430; half-/full-day land tour (minimum two people) US\$43/75; village cultural tour (minimum eight people) US\$55; half-/full-day kayak tour US\$60/106.

Swimming & Fishing

Yap's waters contain marlin, yellowfin tuna, barracuda and trevally. The most accessible beaches are Wanyan Beach (Map p127) in Tomil-Gagil and the beach at Bechiyal (Map p127); women should cover up on the beach. The dive shops offer fishing trips (see left).

YAP FOR CHILDREN

Kids will love Yap; it's a quirky place that will keep them wide-eyed and curious. Take them for a stroll around **Colonia** (p128), the walk-friendly capital. In town, the **Ethnic Art Village** (p128) is a good place to start, where you might be able to catch a traditional dance performance, watch a Yapese artist paint a scene of exquisite beauty, or even arrange for the little tackers to learn to dance the Yapese way. Stop off at the **Yap Art Studio & Gallery** (p129), where you'll be able to buy a T-shirt or woodcarving emblazoned with traditional designs. Try lunch at the **Manta Ray Bay Hotel** (p133); its restaurant is a traditional Indonesian *phin-isi* boat moored in the harbour, and that's got to thrill any kid worth their red cordial. Later, stroll through **Balabat village** (p129) to see some stone money (tell your children it's pocket money for Yapese kids). Drive up to **Bechiyal** (opposite) to see a traditional men's house, or ask the **Traders' Ridge Resort** (see p133) to suggest a family-friendly tour of the island's cultural attractions from its extensive program.

TOURS

Guided sightseeing tours can be arranged through the hotels and the dive shops. If you want a recommendation, ask for Sebastian at Traders' Ridge (p133); he's a very knowledgeable and hospitable Yapese fellow, and

he'll deepen your understanding of the island and its people.

Traders' Ridge offers an incredible selection of tours and classes, with most monies going to the Yapese involved; it's recommended that you book the more elaborate tours in advance of your trip to Yap.

Here's just a very small selection of what's on offer:

Biking Tour (US\$55) Goes around back roads and pathways.

Forbidden Island Land and Boat Tour (US\$95)

Goes to the atoll of Rumung, which has been closed to all foreigners since the 17th century, except Traders' Ridge.

Private Village Tour (half/full day US\$65/100) Offers the chance to talk one-on-one with elders and observe daily life in Wanad Village.

Traditional Land Tour (half/full day US\$55/110) Visits a stone-money bank and a men's house.

Traditional Sailing Canoe Tour (US\$40) Accompanies five local navigators on a Yapese sailing canoe.

WWII Relics and Aviation Ruins Tour (US\$25)

SLEEPING

On Yap every speck of land is privately owned, so you'll need to obtain permission to camp from the landowner; the tourist office should be able to help. The one notable exception is Bechiyal (p130), where arrangements have been made to accommodate

campers; again, contact the tourist office for details.

Pathways Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 350 3310; www.pathways.com; s/d US\$115/125; ☼) This ecoresort is beautiful, a collection of freestanding hillside cottages that balances modern comforts with traditional Yapese aesthetics. Each cottage is built with native materials and features pleasant sitting verandas, many with a clear view of Chamorro Bay, surrounded by a gardenlike setting. There's a wonderful restaurant and bar, too. Perfect.

Manta Ray Bay Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 350 2300; www.mantaray.com; s/d from US\$150/194; ☼) This three-storey hotel is a favourite with divers due to the popular dive shop (see p131) on the premises. Management have gone all out to do something different with the décor: the 28 large, comfortable rooms have rattan furnishings, poster beds and marine motifs, with each room themed after different types of fish; even the bedspreads fall into line. There's an atmospheric restaurant (opposite) here.

O'Keefe's Waterfront Inn (Map p129; ☎ 350 6500; PO Box 68, Yap; www.okeefesyp.com; r US\$155; ☼) This small, cosy, colonial-style place is right on the waterfront, with a gorgeous bar almost touching the water; it's as though you're on a houseboat. The place is full of wooden

floors, low-beamed ceilings, rocking chairs and period photographs on the walls; the cream-toned rooms (with elegant wood trim) have lots of great little touches such as native art and trinkets, and inset TVs that can be hidden behind wall paintings.

Traders' Ridge Resort (Map p129; ☎ 350 6000; www.tradersridge.com; r from US\$215; ☼) The Ridge is an upscale place, accented in a Victorian architectural style, with rooms superbly complemented by Micronesian artworks and locally made furniture. The resort presides over the bay from its hill-top perch and features landscaped grounds with island artworks sprinkled among them; there's also a superb bar and a great restaurant (right). Even if you're not staying here, it's worth popping in; the complex is home to the excellent Ethnic Art Village (p128).

Ulithi Adventure Resort Inn (☎ 350 2360; www.diveulithi.com; Falalop Island; inland/ocean-view rooms US\$100/125; ☼) On Falalop, this is the only hotel in the outer islands. The resort's 10 rooms are clean and comfortable, surrounded by palm trees and beach, and service is friendly and personable.

Village View Hotel (Map p127; ☎ 350 3956; www.rizedivingcentre.com; PO Box 758, Yap; r from US\$55; ☼) These Western-style duplex units are on a pleasant and quiet (but sometimes windy) beach. It's a cheeky little getaway, although it's a long haul into town if you want to dine out.

ESA Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 350 2139; www.yapesabayview.com; s/d US\$97/105) This older motel-style place by Chamorro Bay has clean but plain rooms, with refrigerators, phones and TVs. Ask for a room with a balcony overlooking the bay; it makes all the difference.

EATING

Manta Ray Restaurant (Map p129; ☎ 350 2300; Manta Ray Bay Hotel; mains US\$14-22; ☼ lunch & dinner) This place features teak beams, walls and floors, more nooks and crannies than you can count, and the best view. Why? Because it's actually a 100-year-old schooner – the *SV Mnuw* – which was sailed from Indonesia to Yap and converted into a terrific restaurant. You can have tasty pizza and burgers here, but there are also Asian local dishes such as steamed mangrove crab and 'Diver's Dream' – grilled fish with lemon-butter sauce.

Pathways Hotel (Map p129; ☎ 350 3310; Pathways Hotel; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This beautiful, open-air courtyard, built in the Yapese style (like the hotel), makes a nice setting for any meal. Local seafood is a speciality, and the place has an addictive atmosphere of bonhomie.

Veranda View Conservatory Restaurant (Map p129; ☎ 350 6000; Traders' Ridge Resort; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place boasts the 'only Yapese chef on Yap', and the food is indeed unique. Set among the leafy, atmospheric grounds of Traders' Ridge Resort, here you can try local favourites like coconut *seviche* and taro-leaf soup. The restaurant is located on the site of the former Japanese command post and has a terrific view of Chamorro Bay.

Oasis (Map p129; Colonia; lunches US\$3-7; ☼ breakfast & lunch) This popular place sits literally on top of O'Keefe's Kanteen, with a fine view of the harbour. The blackened sashimi is a real winner and there are good sandwiches and rice dishes.

Also:

ESA (Map p129; ☎ 350 2139; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Adequate Japanese-style food and a good waterfront setting.

Ganir (Map p129; Colonia; mains US\$7-10; ☼ lunch & dinner) Japanese-style dishes in an upstairs, open-air space.

DRINKING

O'Keefe's Kanteen (Map p129; ☎ 350 4534) This is a fantastic little period bar, built on the historic site of an 1874 canteen owned by His Majesty himself, David O'Keefe (see p128). It's an atmospheric, low-ceilinged cove and has indoor and outdoor seating; it even sells the famous book about O'Keefe (see p102) and there's live music some nights.

The best hotels have simply awesome bars: Traders' Ridge (left), perched on a hill; Pathways (opposite), surrounded by greenery and traditional Yapese architecture; and Manta Ray (opposite), on an Indonesian schooner (mind that narrow gangplank when drunk).

SHOPPING

Yap has fine native handicrafts. *Lava-lava* skirts, hand-woven from cotton or hibiscus and banana-tree fibres, can make attractive wall hangings; also consider handbags or betel-nut pouches.

BETEL NUT

Expatriates (and dentists) regard betel-nut chewing as rather disgusting, but in Yap everyone chews *buw*, as betel nut (the seed of the areca palm) is called. The Yapese split the nut open while it's green, then chew it with crushed coral lime and pepper leaves. The three components produce a mild intoxication that lasts about 10 minutes. Sometimes tobacco, or tobacco soaked in vodka, is added. The process produces masses of vivid red saliva (the very first European explorers were horrified, believing the entire Yapese race to be mortally sick and coughing up blood), staining the teeth red and eventually causing them to go black; the lime is highly caustic and can (after many years of use) cause serious mouth ulcers and cancer in some cases.

Seeing a foreigner indulging brings broad smiles to the faces of locals, so if you're up for it, buy a bag from the local store; your teeth won't rot after just a few. Take the husked seed between your back teeth and crack it near the stem end. Prise it open and pluck the nut out. Chew the nut in the back of your mouth to one side. Your chewing technique will largely determine how high you fly, and you may be underwhelmed by your first try. Watch how others do it, ask questions, and be warned: until you're well practised, the voluminous red spit is likely to run down your chin and stain your clothes.

Betel nut is also popular in Palau; in the Solomon Islands, where it's known as *bia blong Solomon* (Solomons' beer); across Southeast Asia; and on the Indian subcontinent. Old timers say that even ghosts chew it. When outrigger canoes would stop for no obvious reason in the middle of a lagoon, the sailor would prepare a betel-nut mixture, wrap it in extra leaves and tie it up tightly with many knots. He would then throw it overboard and sail away, while the ghost who'd been holding up his canoe was kept busy untying knots.

You can buy crafts directly from the artists at the Ethnic Art Village (p128) or the Yap Art Studio & Gallery (p129).

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Add 5% hotel tax to Kosrae's accommodation rates, 6% to Pohnpei's, and 10% to Chuuk's and Yap's. Camping is not customary as most land is privately owned; see the respective states for exceptions. Some budget places may not accept credit cards, so make sure you have alternative financial arrangements. Most hotels will provide free airport transfers if you call ahead.

ACTIVITIES

All four islands have sensational diving; some divers prefer Kosrae and Pohnpei, away from the crowds of Chuuk and Yap. For detailed information on diving possibilities in the FSM, see p75. Surfing is also taking off in Kosrae (see p108) and Pohnpei (see p117).

Snorkellers will find good reefs on all islands. Fishing and kayaking are possible on most islands.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are from around 8am to 4.30pm on weekdays; banking hours are typically from 10am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and 10am to 5pm on Friday.

CHILDREN

The main FSM islands are good for kids. Weno in Chuuk being the possible exception. See the respective states for details.

PRACTICALITIES

- There's no TV station in the FSM.
- Videos are in NTSC format.
- The electricity supply is 110/120V AC, 60Hz; plugs are US style with two flat blades. Power outages are frequent on Yap; don't leave laptops unattended.
- The FSM uses the imperial system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

HOW MUCH?

- **750mL bottle of Smirnoff vodka:** US\$7
- **Internet access:** US\$4 per hour
- **Cup of sakau:** US\$2
- **Car hire:** from US\$40 per day
- **Fish dish:** US\$15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon of petrol:** US\$4
- **1L bottled water:** US\$1
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** 60c
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$15
- **Packet of betel nut:** US\$2

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Federated States of Micronesia Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Fiji (☎ 679-304 180)

Guam (☎ 671-646 9154)

Japan (☎ 81-33-585 5456)

USA Hawai'i (☎ 808-836 4775); Washington (☎ 202-223 4383)

Embassies in the Federated States of Micronesia

Australia (Map p111; ☎ 320 5448; Pohnpei)

USA (Map p111; ☎ 320 2187; Pohnpei)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

All the islands celebrate Constitution Day on 10 May and Independence Day on 3 November; each state also has its own national day. Kosrae's **Liberation Day** (8 September) features singing, dancing and sporting contests, including canoe racing. All islands celebrate Christmas with gusto and flair, Kosrae in particular. Kosrae also holds an annual **Festival of Arts Week** in September and the **Kosrae State Fair** in November.

Yap's big traditional celebrations are called *mitmit*. These are all-out feasts accompanied by gift-giving, singing and dancing. One village hosts a *mitmit* for another village to reciprocate for one it received in previous years. The completion of a major village project, such as a new community house, is also a time for major festivities in Yap.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.kosrae.com Official Kosrae site.

www.pohnpeiheaven.com A Pohnpei tribute site run by Alex Zuccarelli, who refers to himself as an 'aspiring human being'.

www.visit-fsm.org Official FSM site.

MONEY

The US dollar is the currency throughout the FSM. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. Pohnpei and Chuuk each have one ATM. Credit cards are accepted at most top-end and midrange hotels and many dive shops, but some budget places may not accept them.

TIME

Chuuk and Yap are 10 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Pohnpei and Kosrae are 11 hours ahead of GMT.

VISAS

Passports are not required of US citizens, but it's a good idea to carry one anyway; travellers have been held up without one. Each of the states has its own immigration process so you automatically get a new entry permit, good for up to 30 days, each time you fly into a new district centre. Entry permits can be extended through the immigration offices for a total stay of up to 90 days, or up to 365 days for US citizens.

TRANSPORT IN THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Continental Airlines Kosrae (☎ 370 3024); Pohnpei (☎ 320 2424); Chuuk (☎ 330 2424); Yap (☎ 350 2127)
The only international airline servicing the FSM.

ISLAND-HOPPING

Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae are stopovers on Continental's island-hopper ticket. Yap is between Guam and Palau on Continental's flight route; to get there from other FSM islands, you must stop in Guam.

Sea

Yachties note: you must obtain clearance at an official port of entry for each state that you visit. Getting clearance for Kosrae does not allow you free movement within Pohnpei or Chuuk.

Ports of entry are Lelu and Okat Harbors in Kosrae, Kolonia in Pohnpei, Weno anchorage in Chuuk, and Tomil Harbor and Ulithi anchorage in Yap.

GETTING AROUND

Air & Boat

Yap and Pohnpei both have local carriers that fly to the outer islands. State boats also operate there, as well as in Chuuk; see the respective states for further details.

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure taxes are US\$10 from Pohnpei, US\$15 from Chuuk and US\$10 from Kosrae. Yap has no departure tax.

Car

Your home driving licence will be good for 30 days in each state. All islands have car-hire agencies; prices start at around US\$35 to US\$40 per day with unlimited mileage. Drive on the right-hand side of the road.

Local Transport

TAXI

Chuuk and Pohnpei have excellent shared taxi systems; Kosrae and Yap have small private taxis.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Fiji

A sprawling brew of lush islands surrounded by kaleidoscopic reefs, the many landscapes of Fiji interrupt the skyline with volcanic banks of green. Beneath the cobalt sea, the ocean teems with vivid coral and a wealth of marine life. But while the façade meets brochure expectations, it's only half the beauty. Equally vibrant are the Fijian people, whose unaffected warmth is tireless. The cheer of a single *Bula!* ('Hi! Cheers! Welcome!' all at once) can relax the most harried of tourists, and locals manage to imbue a sense of grace into everything they do.

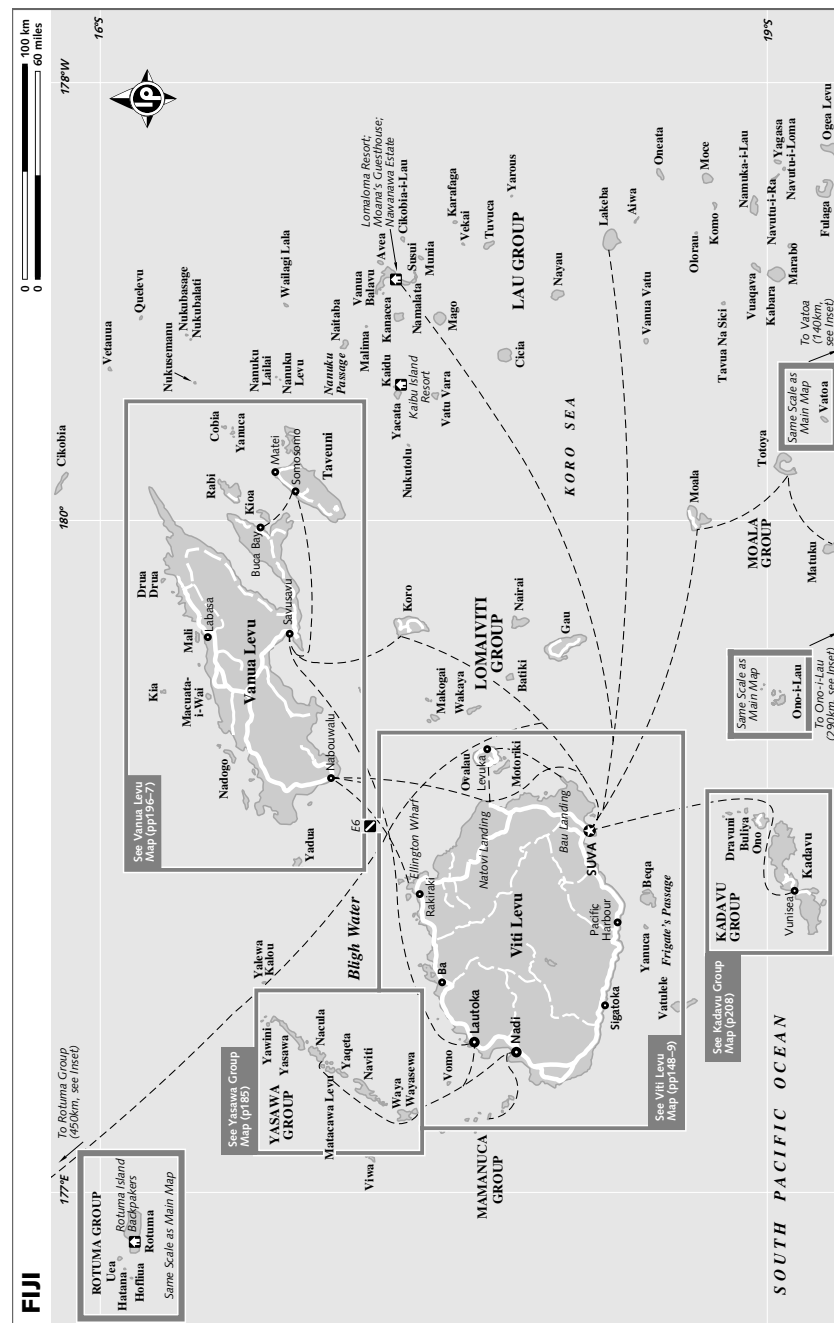
Encompassing some 332 islands, the Fijian archipelago is the quintessential holiday destination. Having been in the tourist game for several decades, Fijians have learned a thing or two about how to look after visitors and, more importantly, precisely when not to.

Most people head here for a dose of that somniferous sun. Comfortable resorts in the Yasawas and Mamanucas oblige with endless opportunities to swim, surf, snorkel, kayak or simply wallow. World-class diving can be found in the magical Astrolabe Reef off Kadavu or Somosomo Strait beneath Vanua Levu. Viti Levu, the largest island, offers a cultural feast: mountain villages, archaeological sites, colourful Hindu temples, and an urban mélange, where you can tax the credit card with souvenirs, saris, *sulus* and superlative cuisine. For the romantics and recluses there's harmony to be found on the remote shorelines of the Taveuni and the Lomaiviti Isles.

In a (coco)nut shell, Fiji is arguably the easiest place in the South Pacific to travel around. The population adopts you on arrival and, best of all, the place caters to backpackers, couples, families, retirees, adventurers, beach bums and everyone in between.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Fling yourself at the mercy of a party resort in the **Mamanuca Group** (p178)
- Make like the good, the bad or the ugly among the old western buildings of **Levuka** (p190)
- Trek or mountain bike your way to a summit in the **Viti Levu Highlands** (p177)
- Succumb to the sun and sea on postcard-perfect **Oarsman's Bay Beach** (p188) in the Yasawas
- Don a mask, fins and maybe even a tank to explore Taveuni's **Somosomo Strait** (p202) and Kadavu's **Great Astrolabe Reef** (p207)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Fiji has a mild, tropical maritime climate, with average temperatures of around 25°C throughout the year. Hot summer days can reach 31°C, but during the coolest months (July and August) the temperature can drop to between 18°C and 20°C. Humidity averages 70% to 80% in Suva year-round and 60% to 70% in Lautoka. The wet season ('summer') is November to April and the dry season ('winter') lasts from May to October, though rainfall occurs throughout the year. For general climate information and Suva's climate chart, see p827.

The cyclone season coincides with the summer wet season, November to April. Fiji has been hit by an average of 10 to 12 cyclones per decade, with two or three of them being very severe. In early 2003 Cyclone Ami hit northwestern Fiji, leaving Labasa under 1.2m of water and wiping out much of the sugar-cane industry.

May to October is the best period to visit Fiji, as temperatures are cooler in the dry season and humidity sits a comfortable distance below stifling. November, February and March are also good as there are fewer tourists and you're more likely to find bargain accommodation. Diwali is held in late October or early November and can be a fun, if manic, time to be in Fiji (see p211).

If you're travelling to Fiji during the wet season, it's best to head to drier regions such as the Mamanuca and Yasawa Groups. December and January are busy months as they coincide with school holidays in both Australia and New Zealand (NZ), and people visiting relatives.

FIJI FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Suva (Viti Levu)
- **Population:** 840,000
- **Land area:** 18,300 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 679
- **Currency:** Fijian dollar (F\$)
- **Languages:** English, Fijian and Hindi-Fijian
- **Greeting:** *Bula* (Hello), Fijian; *Kaise* (Hello), Hindi-Fijian
- **Website:** www.bulafiji.com

HISTORY Vitians

'Fiji' is actually the Tongan name for these islands, which was adopted by the Europeans. The inhabitants formerly called their home Viti.

Vitian culture was shaped by Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian peoples over 35 centuries of settlement. The Lapita people arrived from Vanuatu and the eastern Solomon Islands in about 1500 BC (see p39), and for about 1000 years they lived along the coasts and fished to their hearts' (and stomachs') content. Around 500 BC they became keen on agriculture and as a result the population shot up, tribal feuding got nasty and cannibalism became common.

European Arrival & Settlement

In the early 19th century Fiji was known to European whalers, sandalwood and *bêche-de-mer* traders. By the 1830s a small whaling and beachcomber settlement had been established at Levuka on Ovalau. It became one of the main ports of call in the South Pacific, and was the centre of the notorious blackbirding trade (see p46). Blackbirding originally encouraged the emigration of labourers from throughout the South Pacific (mainly the Solomons and Vanuatu) to work on Fijian plantations, but eventually the trade involved the kidnapping of islanders to work as labourers.

The introduction of firearms by the Europeans resulted in an increase in violent tribal warfare, particularly from the late 1840s to the early 1850s. The eventual victor, Ratu Seru Cakobau of Bau, became known to foreigners as Tui Viti (King of Fiji), despite having no real claim over most of Fiji.

By the mid-19th century London Missionary Society pastors and Wesleyan Methodist missionaries had found their way to Fiji, having entered the Southern Lau Group from Tahiti and Tonga in the 1830s. They gradually displaced the priests of the old religion and assumed privileged positions in island society, instilling a legacy of influence.

In 1849, when the home of a US commercial agent was accidentally destroyed by fire and not-so-accidentally looted, 'King' Cakobau was held responsible and presented with a bill for US\$45,000. In 1862

Cakobau proposed that Britain should foot the bill to cover his debts, in exchange for cession of Fiji. The British consul declined, but the rumours caused a large influx of settlers to Levuka. Cakobau's huge debt was not cleared until 1868, when the Australian Polynesia Company agreed to pay it in exchange for land.

In 1871 Cakobau formed a Fiji-wide government but, unable to maintain peace, it quickly crumbled. Two years later Britain agreed to annex Fiji, citing blackbirding as its principal justification. Fiji was pronounced a British crown colony on 10 October 1874.

Colonial Period & Independence

Fiji's economy became depressed following the slump in the cotton market that occurred at the end of the US Civil War. Unrest and epidemics ensued, with measles wiping out a third of the indigenous population. Fearing a racial war, the colonial government sought the support of the chiefs in order to control the masses. The existing Fijian hierarchy was incorporated into the colonial administration and, in order to curb quibbling, the sale of land to foreigners was forbidden.

In 1882 the administrative capital was moved to Suva, as Levuka's geography hindered expansion. Under increasing pressure to make the Fijian economy self-sufficient, the colonial government turned to plantation crops, which demanded large pools of cheap labour. Indentured labour seemed the perfect solution and between 1879 and 1916 around 60,537 Indians were transported to Fiji on five-year work contracts. Many came with hopes of escaping poverty, but were faced with heavy work allocations, low wages, unjust treatment and rationed food. The overcrowded accommodation forced people of different caste and religion to mix. Despite the hardship, the vast majority of *girmityas* decided to stay in Fiji once they had served their contract and many brought their families across from India to join them. They were prohibited from buying land and discouraged from interacting with Fijians.

On 10 October 1970 Fiji regained its independence after 96 years of colonial administration. The new constitution followed the British model, although political seats and parties were racially divided.

Fiji's first postindependence election was won by the indigenous Fijian Alliance Party (FAP), and Fijians were at first optimistic about their future. However, underlying racial tensions grew as the economy worsened. Most shops and transport services were (and still are) run by Indo-Fijian families, and a racial stereotype developed portraying Indo-Fijians as being obsessed with making money. In reality, just like indigenous Fijians, the vast majority of Indo-Fijians belonged to poorer working classes and – unlike indigenous Fijians – they would never be able to have secure land tenure on their farming leases.

The Era of the Coups

Greater unity among workers led to the formation of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP), and in April 1987 an FLP government was elected in coalition with the National Federation Party (NFP). Despite having a Fijian prime minister and majority indigenous-Fijian cabinet, the new government was labelled 'Indian dominated' and racial tensions rose. On 14 May 1987, only a month after the elections, Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka took over the elected government in a bloodless coup and formed a civil interim government supported by the Great Council of Chiefs.

In September 1987 Rabuka again intervened with military force. The 1970 constitution was invalidated, Fiji was declared a republic and dismissed from the Commonwealth and Rabuka proclaimed himself head of state.

The coups, which were supposed to benefit all indigenous Fijians, in fact caused immense hardship. The economy's two main sources of income, sugar and tourism, were seriously affected and overseas aid was suspended. From 1987 to 1992 about 50,000 people – mostly Indo-Fijian skilled tradespeople and professionals – emigrated and ethnic tensions continued to stew for the next 10 years.

In the elections of May 1999 the FLP formed a coalition with the Fijian Association Party. Indo-Fijian Mahendra Chaudhry became prime minister, and indigenous Fijians were far from pleased. Convinced that their traditional land rights were at stake, many refused to renew century-old leases to Indo-Fijian farmers.

INDO-FIJIAN HISTORY & CULTURE *Clement Paligaru*

With enterprise and resilience, Indo-Fijians have forged a presence that permeates the whole country. By 1919, when indentured labour was abolished, independent sugar-cane, cotton, tobacco and rice farms had been established by many Indo-Fijians on land mostly leased from indigenous Fijians, who had been granted sole ownership of land by the British Government. Other Indo-Fijians ran small stores or became public servants and maids. The big move into commerce began in the 1930s, following the arrival of a second wave of business migrants from India. There was no doubt that Indo-Fijians were hard working and many were becoming prosperous. Some indigenous Fijians found they didn't make bad friends either, but their success did not go down terribly well with others. This tension has continued to this day and has led to three coups since the mid-1980s.

The majority of today's Indo-Fijians are the descendants of indentured labourers who arrived in Fiji up to 130 years ago. Members of different castes were forced to share the same cramped quarters on plantations and were compelled to dispense with many of the social mores and rigidities they had brought from India. A more laid-back culture evolved, influenced by the infectious Pacific way of life.

The relative ease with which Indo-Fijians socialise and engage is one of the characteristics that set them apart from other Indians, especially the subcontinental middle classes. For example, in Fiji wedding invitations from economically disadvantaged or village-based relatives are seized upon by their well-to-do relatives as an opportunity to have a catch-up and indulge in

feasting and celebration. Such disregard for social codes would be frowned upon in India.

The Indo-Fijian community has forged a strong identity in its adopted homeland. For an Indo-Fijian, being ethnic Indian as opposed to being indigenous Fijian is about emphasising the importance of education and hard work to ensure a secure future. Add thriftiness for good measure and you have the core of the Indo-Fijian package.

India remains an important cultural beacon for Indo-Fijians, influencing rituals, culinary traditions, dress and entertainment. Most Indo-Fijians love homemade rotis (traditional breads) served straight from the oven, steaming-hot curries and rice, with condiments completing the meal. Many have a weakness for *mithai* (traditional sweets). Tradition, pride and identity have also ensured that saris, the colourful Indian dress worn by women, remain popular in Fiji. The Muslim- and Punjabi-influenced *salwaar-kameez* is also *de rigueur*.

Entertainment and recreation continue to have a decidedly subcontinental flavour for many Indo-Fijians, with local cinemas providing a regular dose of Hindi-language Bollywood films and music. Indo-Fijian home-entertainment systems are often tuned to provide Bollywood on tap, as well as an endless supply of Hindi-pop music videos. Apart from the pure escapism value, Bollywood films also provide many with the only connection they have with India and subcontinental Hindi.

India remains a cultural touchstone but most Indo-Fijians will never visit the subcontinent. Some may go there to explore their cultural

heritage and ancestry, others might visit out of curiosity, but few are compelled to take the journey as an affirmation of their identity. It is to Fiji that they turn for that.

Most aspects of Indo-Fijian lifestyle and culture have comfortably coexisted for over a century with the indigenous Fijian way of life. Large numbers of Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians live side by side, work together and go to the same schools. But apart from attending some sports, entertainment and special occasions together, the two groups don't tend to engage socially. Their economic, educational, cultural and social priorities, including *tabu*, differ. These differences have proven rich fodder for political agitators seeking to exploit the insecurities of indigenous Fijians. Consequently, Indo-Fijians are still considered *vulagi* (visitors) by many indigenous Fijians.

Many Indo-Fijians have left the country in search of economic and political stability. However, this has not stalled the momentum of a mutual cultural exploration by Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians. Increasing numbers from both communities speak each other's language. In Fiji's cane belts on the western side of Viti Levu and around Labasa on Vanua Levu, many indigenous cane farmers who work alongside Indo-Fijians speak Fiji-Hindi fluently, while their families immerse themselves in Bollywood films. Indo-Fijian music and songs have even been recorded and released commercially by indigenous Fijian artists. Elsewhere, Indo-Fijians in rural communities, including former Christian mission settlements, also speak Fijian. More generally, indigenous women are wearing Indian jewellery and using sari cloth for trad-

itional outfits. Nightclubs are playing Bollywood DJ mixes. Bars are serving bowls of curry with drinks the way Indo-Fijians do in their homes. Across the country, sport, in particular soccer, continues to play an important role. Team members hold regular curry, beer and kava nights and banter in Hindi or Fijian. Indo-Fijians are now even playing the indigenous Fijian-dominated rugby. And when victorious national rugby sides return from overseas, Indian classical dancers greet them along with the thousands of Fijian spectators.

But the most amazing transformation that has taken place is the elevation of Indian food in indigenous Fijian life. In many homes, almost every second meal has to be curry. So be prepared for a spicy meal if you accept an invitation to an indigenous Fijian home anticipating islander food.

Annual festivals and events offer the visitor a chance to experience Indo-Fijian culture. Diwali (Festival of Lights) takes place across the nation around October or November. You can join in the fun by wearing some traditional gear (perhaps an Indian scarf or *bindi* on the forehead) and sharing *mithai* (sweets) and candles. Religious events include temple fairs, where thousands of Indo-Fijians gather to watch rituals and enjoy folksy meals. In Suva the South Indian fire-walking festival, held during July or August, takes place at the Mariamma Temple on Howell Rd in Samabula. On Vanua Levu, the Ram Leela festival is held at the Mariamman Temple in Vinivau around October.

An Indo-Fijian, Clement Paligaru came to Australia in 1984. He has reported extensively on the Pacific region for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

On 19 May 2000 armed men entered parliament in Suva and took 30 hostages, including Prime Minister Chaudhry. Failed businessman George Speight quickly became the face of the coup, claiming to represent indigenous Fijians. He demanded the resignation of both Chaudhry and President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and that a 1997 multi-ethnic constitution be abandoned.

Support for Speight's group was widespread, and Indo-Fijians suffered such harassment that many fled the country. Both Chaudhry and Mara eventually stepped down and the head of Fiji's military, Commander Frank Bainimarama, announced

martial law. After eight weeks in captivity the hostages were released, and the 1997 constitution was revoked. The coup drew international disapproval and, once again, the economy collapsed, particularly the tourism sector. Speight was eventually arrested and charged with treason. He is currently serving a life sentence.

To Be Continued...

In March 2001 the Appeal Court upheld the 1997 constitution and ruled that Fiji be taken to the polls in order to restore democracy. Laisenia Qarase, heading the Fijian People's Party (SLD), won 32 of the

71 parliamentary seats in the August 2001 elections and proceeded to defy the spirit of the constitution by including no FLP members in his cabinet.

Elections are usually a two-horse affair between the SLD party and the FLP. The government's draft Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (PRTU) Bill has divided the country: supporters say it will start to heal the wounds left by the last coup; opponents say that its amnesty provisions will allow those involved in the 2000 coup to disown responsibility for their actions. At one stage Commander Bainimarama threatened martial law if the bill

was passed, and the police and military's strong opposition to the PRTU Bill fuels continuous rumours that another coup is in the offing. Stay tuned...

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

If you've just read the foregoing brief summary of Fiji's history you might be hesitant to delve too deeply into the national psyche, which would be a shame because the Fijian people are the country's greatest asset. A smile goes a long way here, and Fijians of all backgrounds go to great lengths to make visitors feel welcome.

Sometimes, however, these lengths can be too great. Not wishing to disappoint, a Fijian 'yes' might mean 'maybe' or 'no', which can be disconcerting if not confusing for visitors. Face-to-face confrontation is rare, but debate is a healthy component of daily life (just scan the readers' letters of any newspaper and you'll get the gist). The different challenges facing indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians remain key to a sense of national identity, and you're likely to hear both sides of the story in complete candour during any visit.

Lifestyle

INDIGENOUS FIJIAN

Most indigenous Fijians live in villages in *mataqali* (extended family groups) and acknowledge a hereditary chief who is usually male. Each *mataqali* is allocated land for farming and also has communal obligations. Village life is supportive but also conservative; being different or too ambitious is seen to threaten the village's stability, and traditional gender roles are still very much in evidence.

Concepts such as *kerekere* (obligatory sharing) and *sevusevu* (a gift presented in exchange for an obligatory favour) are still strong, especially in remote areas. The consumption of *yaqona*, or kava, remains an important social ritual, and clans gather on special occasions for traditional *lovo* feasts and *meke*.

INDO-FIJIANS

Most of this group are fourth- or fifth-generation descendants of indentured labourers. The changes these labourers were forced to undergo, such as adapting to living communally with Indians from diverse backgrounds, created a relatively unrestricted, enterprising society distinct from the Indian cultures they left behind. This is the basis for the Indo-Fijian culture of today.

Extended families often live in the same house, and in rural areas it's common for girls to have arranged marriages at a young age. Many women wear traditional dress, although dress codes are more cosmopolitan in Suva. See the boxed text, p140, for more details.

ACTING FOR CHANGE Anna Stone

Priya and Jerry are a young couple in Fiji. Priya is from a working class Indo-Fijian family; Jerry is an indigenous Fijian, training to be a teacher. Priya's family expects her to marry someone they have chosen, as is Indian tradition, and not Jerry. The pressure and violence that comes with the resulting family conflict eventually becomes too much for Priya and she ends her life.

Priya's story is the subject of a new play, developed with funding from International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) by a group of young women and men in Fiji with help from one of the many local NGOs, Women's Action for Change. While this story is fictional, the type of family situation portrayed is known to most in Fiji.

The play, called *Another Way*, looks at how various pressures, such as unemployment, poverty, class conflicts and patriarchal attitudes, can have tragic consequences, including depression, alcohol abuse, violence and even suicide. As a conservative country, many topics such as sexuality, reproductive health and violence against women are often too difficult to discuss openly. One very popular and successful method used to work around this difficulty is to use theatre as a form of communication. Performances can be carried out anywhere and are often outdoors, with limited or sometimes no props, and audience members are encouraged to participate. Shows often end in lively discussions with traditional attitudes and beliefs being challenged. It is these discussions that make it possible for positive changes to the lives of Fijian women, particularly young women, to begin to take place.

Keep a look out for flyers advertising this or other similar plays. Most performances are in Suva, Nadi or Lautoka, however, Women's Action for Change is planning on expanding the areas they work in. Contact Women's Action for Change directly on ☎ 331 4363 for performance schedules or for more information on the project; for more details on the International Women's Development Agency go to www.iwda.org.au.

Anna Stone is an Overseas Program Manager with IWDA who worked in Suva for six months as an intern for UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) Pacific Regional Office.

MODERN PRESSURES Virginia Jealous

Fiji is becoming increasingly urbanised, and it is in the towns and cities that traditional values and the wisdom of elders are often less respected. Many young people travel to the cities for education, employment or to escape the restrictions of village life, but with increased freedom comes competition for jobs and a less supportive social structure. Television's mostly imported programmes present different values and send contradictory messages.

This urban drift is becoming a challenge for Fiji, with squatter-settlements on the edges of many towns. As everywhere, high levels of deprivation have led to the presence of beggars and street kids, and an increase in crime.

For those in work, disposable income is almost nonexistent. With wages for government workers around F\$150 a week – and just F\$50 for unskilled workers – finding rent is often hard enough. There are exceptions of course, and the salaries of some executives are on a par with the rich world. Spacious houses with big gardens reflect this affluence, but most homes are modest and often crowded.

Population

Fiji's population hovers around 836,000 and growth has virtually halved in the last 30 years, due in no small part to political disharmony since independence. About 25% of Fijians are school age, and around 60% of the population are urban dwellers. Almost half the entire population resides in Suva.

Multiculturalism

Fiji's population is the most multiracial in the South Pacific. Indigenous Fijians are predominantly of Melanesian origin, but there are Polynesian aspects in both their physical appearance and their culture. Most Indo-Fijians are descendants of indentured labourers. They constitute around 40% of the population, although large numbers continue to emigrate.

The government categorises people according to their racial origins, as you'll notice on the immigration arrival card. 'Fijian' means indigenous Fijian, and while many Indo-Fijians have lived in Fiji for several generations they are referred to as 'Indian', just as Chinese-Fijians are 'Chinese'. Fijians of other Pacific-island descent are referred to by the nationality of their ancestors. Australians, Americans, New Zealanders – and Europeans – are 'Europeans'. Mixed Western and Fijian heritage makes a person officially 'part-European'.

As the tourism industry continues to recover after the 2000 coup, increasing numbers of 'Europeans' (which in this case largely refers to Antipodeans, who are as

geographically far from Europe as the globe allows) are immigrating to establish resorts and other tourism ventures. As an overall percentage of the population the numbers are still tiny, although the effects are clearly obvious in some islands and towns such as Savusavu.

RELIGION

Religion is extremely important in all aspects of Fijian society. Of the country's 52% Christians, about 37% are Methodists. Hinduism is practised by 38% and Islam by about 8%.

ARTS

Indigenous Fijian villagers practise traditional arts and crafts, such as woodcarving and pottery, dance and music, and making *masi* (bark cloth, also known as *tapa*). Some arts remain an integral part of the culture, while others are practised solely to satisfy tourist demand. Indo-Fijians, Chinese-Fijians and other cultural groups also retain many of their traditional arts.

Contemporary art includes fashion design, pottery and, though not common, painting and photography. The most likely place to see contemporary work displayed is Suva.

Dance

Visitors are often welcomed with an indigenous *meke*, a dance performance enacting stories and legends. They vary from touristy performances accompanied by a disco-Fijian soundtrack (common in resorts) to the traditional and low-key.

SEARCHING FOR A NATIONAL IDENTITY

Virginia Jealous

Fiji's demographic make-up of almost equal numbers of Fijians and Indians has shaped the country's culture, for both better and worse, and it remains a hot topic. The notion of racial integration has been discouraged since colonial days, and maintained by successive Fiji administrations. The tension between land-owning ethnic Fijians and entrepreneurial Indians is ongoing – in simplified terms, between those who have power but little capital, and those with capital but little power. Visitors will rarely sense this tension, and the upside of Fiji's cultural heritage is a heady mix of laid-back Melanesian lifestyle and Indian street scenes.

One of the best places to see contemporary dance in Fiji is the Oceania Centre for Arts & Culture (p167). The Oceania Dance Theatre and other performance groups utilise the centre, and you can usually watch a free rehearsal on weekday mornings. Temporary exhibits of paintings and carvings are also held here and you may even see an artist at work.

Literature

Fiji's small community of poets and writers produce gritty and real literature. Joseph C Veramu's 1996 novel *Moving Through the Streets* is an eye-opener about disaffected youth in Suva. Daryl Tarte's historical saga *Fiji* and more recent novel *Stalker on the Beach* look at the influence of outsiders on the country.

Beyond Ceremony: An Anthology of Fiji Drama showcases some of Fiji's playwrights, including Vilsoni Hereniko, Sudesh Mishra, Jo Nacola, Raymond Pillai and Larry Thomas.

Since the 1970s Indo-Fijian writers have increasingly worked in English. Writers of note include Subramani, Satendra Nandan and poet Mohit Prasad (*Eating Mangoes*, 2001). The theme of the injustice of indenture rates highly in Indo-Fijian literature.

Collections of women writers' poetry include *Of Schizophrenic Voices* by Frances Koya and *Nei Nim Manoa* by Teresia Teaiwa.

Kava in the Blood (1999) by Peter Thomson is the evocative autobiography of a white Fijian who became a senior civil servant and was imprisoned by Rabuka during the 1987 coup.

Music

Unsurprisingly, reggae has been a major influence on contemporary Fijian music, and you're likely to hear Bob Marley and his Fijian counterparts recycled continuously on popular radio stations. Even if you're not a reggae fan, there's something inimitably Fijian about wailing the latest reggae track out the window and waving comrade-like to locals on a road trip.

Seru Serevi, Danny Costello and bands including Delai Sea and Voqa ni Delai Dokidoki are examples of contemporary Fijian fare. Black Rose is Fiji's most successful music export. Choral CDs are also extremely popular, thanks to the tradition of enthusiastic Sunday service attendance. Missing out on the rousing but dulcet tones of a Fijian mass would be a crime.

Music from Bollywood films and Indian dance and pop music are popular, as is classical *qawwali*. Vocal, tabla (percussion) and sitar lessons are given at Indian cultural centres.

Bark Cloth

You'll most likely become acquainted with *tapa* (also known as *masi* or *malo*), the Fijian art of making bark cloth, during your first shopping expedition. The cloth is made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry bush, which has been soaked in water and scraped clean, then beaten and felted for hours into sheets of a fine, even texture. Intricate rust and brown patterns are printed either by hand or stencil, often carrying symbolic meaning. The paints are traditionally made from an infusion of candlenut and mangrove bark; pinker browns are made from red clays, and black from the soot of burnt *dakua* resin and charred candlenuts. For more about *tapa*, see p57.

LANGUAGE

The majority of indigenous Fijians speak Fijian at home. Indo-Fijians speak Fijian-Hindi but English is the official language and spoken widely.

Fijian basics

Hello.	<i>Bula!</i>
Hello (response).	<i>lo, bula/la, bula</i> (more respectful).
Goodbye (if departing long-term).	<i>Moce.</i>
See you later.	<i>Au saa liu mada.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ni sa bula?</i>
Good, thanks.	<i>An sa bula vinaka.</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>Vinaka (vakalevu).</i>
Yes.	<i>lo.</i>
No.	<i>Sega.</i>
My name is...	<i>O yau o...</i>

Fijian-Hindi basics

Hello. ('How are you?')	<i>kaise</i>
Fine response).	<i>tik</i>
Farewell.	<i>fir milegaa</i>
Yes.	<i>ha</i>
No.	<i>nahi</i>
What's your name?	<i>aapke naam kaa hai?</i>
My name is...	<i>hamaar naam...</i>

There are no equivalents for 'please' and 'thank you' in Fijian-Hindi. To be polite in making requests, people use the word *thoraa* (a little) and a special form of the verb ending in *naa*, eg *thoraa nimak denaa* (please pass the salt). For 'thanks', people often just say *achhaa* (good).

ENVIRONMENT Geography

The Fiji archipelago has about 332 islands, varying from those a few metres in diameter to Viti Levu ('Great Land') at 10,400 sq km. Only about one-third are inhabited. The smaller islands are generally of coral or limestone formation, while the larger ones are of volcanic origin; hot springs continue to boil on Vanua Levu. Fiji's highest peak is Viti Levu's majestic Tomanivi (Mt Victoria) at 1323m.

Ecology

Fiji's tropical forests are home to some of the richest natural communities in the South Pacific. Unfortunately, economic progress and the wheels of industry have seen around 15% of these forests cleared since the 1960s. Logging remains a constant, but many villages are turning to ecotourism as an alternative means of

income. However, while remote villages can benefit from the income brought by low-impact tourism, even sensitive developments bring additional pollution and rapid cultural change. Some resorts like to include the tag 'eco' in their moniker without actually following through with the whole idea.

Waste management is a national problem and marine pollution near Suva is severe. Overfishing and destructive fishing techniques are commonly employed and global warming has contributed to extensive coral bleaching.

Greenpeace and WWF have offices in Suva and they campaign regionally on issues including ocean fisheries and climate change.

BEST EATING

Fijian food is predominantly a blend of Fijian, Indian, Western and Chinese styles, and is best enjoyed at these top eating experiences.

- Old Mill Cottage (p173) is a humble café dishing up authentic Fijian fare, including *palusami* (food wrapped in taro leaves and cooked in a *lovo*) and fish stewed in coconut milk.
- Capital Palace (p172) in Suva has chaotic, boisterous and delicious yum cha sessions on weekend mornings. The predominantly Chinese crowd is all the recommendation you need.
- The chefs at delicate Daikoku in Nadi (p156) and Suva (p172) sizzle up superlative teppanyaki and serve some of the finest sushi and sashimi in the Pacific.
- Vilisite's seafood restaurants in Sigatoka (p162) and on the Coral Coast (p164) cater to seafood fans, with a long menu of traditional and Western dishes from the deep.
- Ashiyana (p172) serves curries so spicy even the taxi drivers fear them.
- Tata's (p156) is an unadorned curry joint absent from the tourist brochures, but the hot and spicy dishes are amongst Fiji's finest.

VITI LEVU

pop 581,000 / area 10,400 sq km

Viti Levu, the largest island in the Fijian archipelago, presides over the country like a great chief. It's where the wheels of industry, commerce and politics turn, and about 75% of the population reside. Rather than offering surf and sun, Viti Levu's greatest asset is its interior – a mass of dense and steamy highlands where you can trek mountains, freshen up under a waterfall and visit a traditional village. A ribbon of comfortable resorts skirt the island's south along the Coral Coast, overlooking a vivid reef just offshore. Suva, the largest city in the South Pacific, is a sultry hub of culture, cuisine and urban activity. In a phrase, Viti Levu is the 'other Fiji', offering visitors a wealth of landscapes and activities they never expected.

ORIENTATION

Suva, the country's capital, largest city and main port, is in the southeast. Most travellers arrive in the west of the island at Nadi International Airport, 9km north of central Nadi and 24km south of Lautoka. See p150 for information on getting to and from Nadi airport.

Nadi and Suva are linked by the sealed Queens Rd which runs along the southern perimeter of Viti Levu (221km) and contains the scattering of villages and resorts known as the Coral Coast.

Heading north from Suva, the Kings Rd is mostly sealed and travels for 265km through Nausori (where Suva's airport is located), the eastern highlands, Rakiraki and Ba (on the north coast), and Lautoka. South of Rakiraki is Fiji's highest point – Tomanivi (Mt Victoria) at 1323m.

Three roads head up from the coast to the Nausori Highlands' villages of Navala and Bukuya (via Ba, Nadi and Sigatoka).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bookmasters (Map p168; ☎ 331 888; 173 Victoria Pde, Suva) Guidebooks, paperbacks, novels and maps.

Fiji Museum (Map p168; ☎ 331 5944; Ratu Cakobau Rd, Suva) The museum gift shop stocks an excellent selection of Fijian history, culture and wildlife literature.

Suva Bookstore (☎ 331 1355; Greig St, Suva)

Internet Access

Alpha Computer (Map p168; ☎ 330 0211; 181 Victoria Pde, Suva)

Bula Internet Café (Map p152; Main St, Nadi)

Connect Internet Café (Map p152; ☎ 670 7365; Shop 6, Connect Arcade, Lot 7, Queens Rd, Nadi)

VITI LEVU IN...

Four Days

In all likelihood you'll land in Nadi – Fiji's international air hub. While you're there, make the most of it by booking a tour to the Nausori Highlands (p151) to see what lies beyond that tumbling ascent of hills. On your return to Nadi enjoy your first Fiji Bitter at atmospheric **Ed's Bar** (p157), then soak up the alcohol with a Fiji-Mex feast at the **Lazy Cactus** (p156).

On day two get outta town and into the vivid orchids at the **Garden of the Sleeping Giant** (p153), then hit the souvenir shops and markets (p157) to put a dent in your wallet.

Day three is all about the coast. Start out with a morning picnic at **Natadola Beach** (p160), Viti Levu's finest stretch of sand, and then make your way to a Coral Coast resort (p164) for views of the offshore reef and some healthy pampering.

On day four scramble up and down the **Sigatoka Sand Dunes** (p162) or, for something less energetic, mingle with the wildlife at **Kula Eco Park** (p163).

One Week

Continue your Viti Levu exploration with a dose of diving in **Beqa Lagoon** (p165) or a kayak tour up the **Navua River** (p165). Rest the bones with an indulgent night at the **Pearl South Pacific** (p165).

Day six should place you firmly in Suva, where you can meander through the **Fiji Museum** (p166), fuel up on a curry or Fijian speciality at the **Old Mill Cottage** (p173) and savour the Suva nightlife at **Traps Bar** (p173).

Connect Internet Café (Map p168; ☎ 330 0777; Post Office Bldg, 10 Thomson St, Suva)

Fintel (Map p168; ☎ 331 2933; 158 Victoria Pde, Suva) The Fiji International Telecommunications office offers Internet access.

Internet Café (Map p158; cnr Narara Pde & Tavewa Ave, Lautoka)

Republic of Cappuccino (Map p168; ☎ 330 0828; Renwick Rd, Suva) Wireless access.

TWicks Internet Café (☎ 652 0928; 50 Sigatoka Valley Rd, Sigatoka)

Medical Services

All Care Medical Clinic (Map p152; ☎ 672 0960; Colonial Plaza, Queens Rd, Namaka, Nadi)

Boulevard Central Pharmacy (Map p168; ☎ 330 3770; Shop 13, Downtown Boulevard Shopping Centre, Ellery St, Suva)

Boulevard Medical Centre (Map p168; ☎ 331 3355; FNPF Downtown Boulevard, 33 Ellery St, Suva)

Colonial War Memorial Hospital (Map p168; ☎ 331 3444; Waimanu Rd, Suva)

Fiji Recompression Chamber Facility (☎ 885 0630; cnr Amy & Brewster Sts, Suva)

Gerona Medical & Surgical Clinic (☎ 652 0128; Sigatoka Valley Rd, Sigatoka)

Lautoka Hospital (☎ 666 0399; Thomson Cres, Lautoka)

Nadi Hospital (Map p152; ☎ 670 1128; Market Rd, Nadi)

Money

ANZ, Colonial National Bank and Westpac branches are abundant in Nadi, Lautoka and Suva. Most have foreign exchange facilities and ATMs that accept MasterCard and Visa. You can also exchange cash at Nadi International Airport. Outside of these cities ATMs are virtually nonexistent and exchange facilities are limited to resorts.

Independent foreign currency exchange:

Just Exchange (Map p152; ☎ 670 5477; Ground fl, Prouds Bldg, Main St, Nadi)

Money Exchange (Map p168; ☎ 330 3566; Thomson St, Suva)

Post

Post office (Map p158; ☎ 666 0987; cnr Vitogo Pde & Tavewa Ave, Lautoka)

Post office (Map p152; ☎ 670 0001; Sahu Khan Rd, Nadi)

Post office (Map p168; ☎ 330 2022; Thomson St, Suva)

Tourist Information

South Pacific Tourism Organisation (Map p168;

☎ 330 4177; www.spto.org; 3rd fl, Dolphin Plaza, cnr Loftus St & Victoria Pde, Suva; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Useful agency and website.

Visitor information centre (Map p152; ☎ 672 2433; www.bulafiji.com; Suite 107, Colonial Plaza, Namaka, Nadi; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri) Head office of the Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB), the government-run tourist information service.

Visitor information centre (Map p168; ☎ 330 2433; www.bulafiji.com; cnr Thomson & Scott Sts, Suva; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Suva office of the FVB.

Travel Agencies

Awesome Adventures Fiji (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com; 2/534 Main St, Nadi) Operates the *Yasawa Flyer* to the Yasawa and Mamanuca Groups (see p184).

Hunts Travel (Map p168; ☎ 331 5288; fax 330 2212; 1st fl, Dominion House Arcade, Thomson St, Suva) Domestic and international flights, plus hotels and cars.

Margaret Travel Service (Map p152; ☎ 672 1988; fax 672 1992; Upstairs, Nadi airport concourse, Nadi)

Rosie Holidays (Map p152; ☎ 672 2755; www.rosiefiji.com; Nadi airport concourse, Nadi) Organises road tours, cruises, accommodation and Thrifty Car Rental.

Sun Vacations (Map p152; ☎ 672 4273; www.sunvacationsfiji.com; Nadi airport concourse, Nadi)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Travelling around Viti Levu is easy and safe and most visitors will encounter a warm reception, particularly in rural areas. As with most urbanised centres, Nadi, Lautoka and Suva offer some dangers. Pickpockets roam, so keep your valuables out of sight, particularly in crowded areas like the market or dance floors. Walking around during daylight hours is a perfectly safe exercise; however, as soon as night begins to descend it's a no go. This is particularly pertinent in Suva – from dusk onwards locals will catch a taxi, even for a distance of 300m, so you should do so as well. Taxis are metered, cheap and safe (see p150).

There have been reports of muggings in Colo-i-Suva Forest Park (see p167), so head there in a group or pay the minimal fee for a guide.

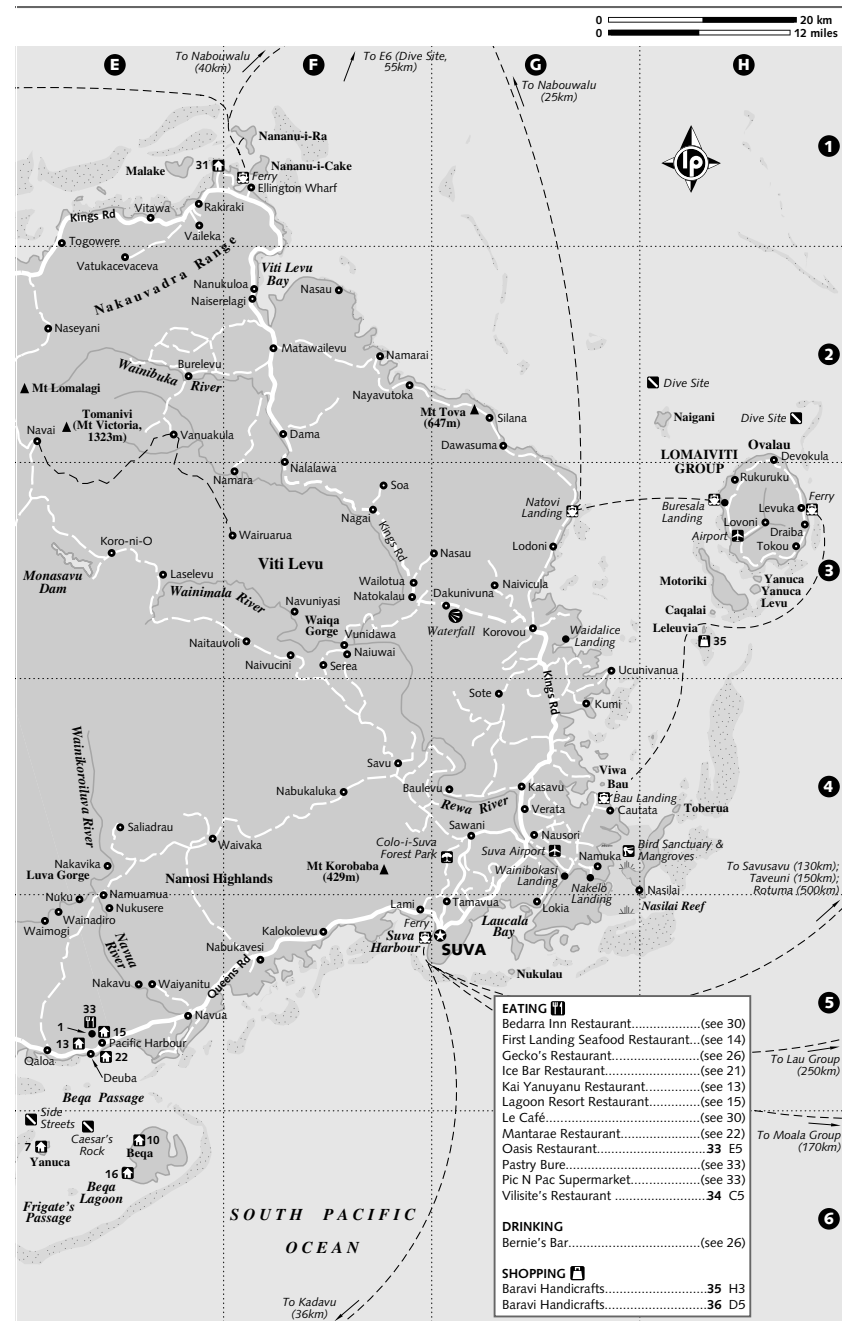
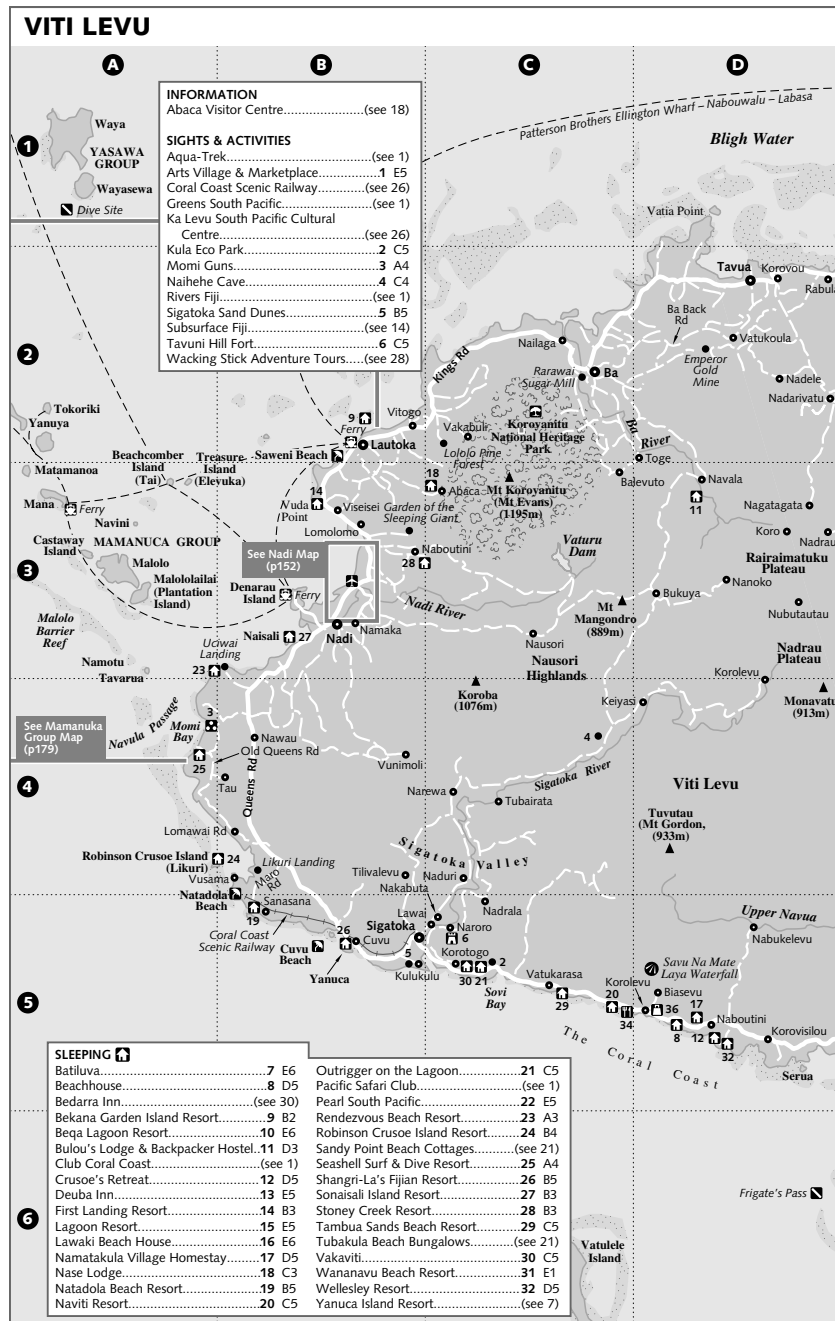
TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR

Most travellers arrive in Fiji at Nadi International Airport. See p213 for details of airline offices.

Air Fiji (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj; 185 Victoria Pde, Suva) and **Sun Air** (☎ 330 8979; www.fiji.to; Victoria Pde, Suva) provide a good network of domestic



flights from Nadi and Suva to many of the other larger islands. Main routes from Suva include: Kadavu (F\$260); Labasa (F\$210) and Savusavu (F\$160) on Vanua Levu; Taveuni (F\$200); Rotuma (F\$430); Vanua Balavu (F\$200) in the Lau Group; and Nadi (F\$170). Main routes from Nadi include Kadavu (F\$330), Labasa (F\$230), Savusavu (F\$220), Taveuni (F\$280) and Suva (F\$170).

BOAT

The following ferry services link Viti Levu to the outer islands:

Awesome Adventures (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com; 2/534 Main St, Nadi) Large catamaran to the Mamanuca and Yasawa Group islands (see p184).

Beachcomber Cruises (☎ 666 1500; www.beachcomberfiji.com; 1 Walu St, Lautoka) Sails from Suva to Savusavu (see p194) and then on to Taveuni (p200).

Consort Shipping (Map p168; ☎ 330 2877; fax 330 3389; Ground fl, Dominion House Arcade, Thomson St, Suva) Follows the same route as Beachcomber Cruises.

Kadavu Shipping (☎ 331 1766, 339 5000, 339 5788; Rona St, Walu Bay, Suva) Sails between Suva and Kadavu (see p207).

Patterson Brothers Shipping Suva (Map p168; ☎ 331 5644; fax 330 1652; Suites 1 & 2, Epworth Arcade, Nina St; Lautoka (Map p158; ☎ 666 1173; 15 Tukani St) Sails to Vanua Levu (see p194) and Levuka (see p190).

Saliabasaga Shipping (☎ 330 3403; Walu Bay, Suva) Sails from Suva to the Lau Group (see p209).

South Sea Cruises (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj; Port Denarau, Nadi) Fast catamarans from Denarau Marina to the Mamanuca islands (see p179).

Western Shipping (☎ 331 4467; Naryan Jetty, Suva) Sails to Rotuma (see p189).

Getting Around

Express buses, tourist buses, minibuses and carriers zip around the island via the Queens and Kings Rds. Sunbeam Transport and Pacific Transport are the main carriers on Viti Levu (see p215 for more information). Before heading to an isolated area, check that there is a return bus so you don't get stranded – sometimes the last bus of the day stays at the final village.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Nadi International Airport is 9km north of downtown Nadi, and there are frequent local buses from just outside the airport along the Queens Rd to town (65c); a taxi is F\$10. Most of the hotels have free transfer vehicles awaiting international flights.

Nausori International Airport is 23km northeast of downtown Suva. There are no direct local buses between Suva and the airport, but **Nausori Taxi & Bus Service** (☎ 331 2185, 330 4178) has regular buses to and from the Holiday Inn in Suva (F\$3). A taxi to or from downtown Suva costs a set F\$20 (debate is futile). Alternatively, cover the 3km to Nausori's bus station by taxi (about F\$3), then catch one of the frequent local buses to Suva bus station for about F\$1.65.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Viti Levu is easy to explore by car or motorcycle, although for the unsealed highland roads you'll generally need a 4WD. See p216 for details of car-hire companies.

TAXI

Taxis generally only use meters in Suva; elsewhere you need to agree on a price before setting out:

Carnarvon Taxi (☎ 331 5315) Suva

Jason's Taxis (☎ 337 2220) Suva

Piccadilly Taxis (☎ 330 4302; ☎ 24hr) Suva

Ratan's Taxi (☎ 346 0329) Pacific Harbour

Sanyo Cabs (☎ 330 4541) Suva

VITI LEVU FOR CHILDREN

Fiji's main island has plenty to offer families with young tackers in tow. If you're staying in the Nadi area, try a day cruise to a resort on one of the **Mamanuca** (p180) or **Yasawa Group islands** (p185), many of which have abundant activities to occupy kids.

A day on the **Coral Coast Scenic Railway** (see p161) is a fun way for kids to gain an appreciation of Fiji's landscape. Nearby, the **Ka Levu South Pacific Cultural Centre** (see p161) showcases Fijian singing, dancing and ceremonies that will entertain children. A little more kitsch and flashy are the demonstrations at the **Arts Village** (p164) in Pacific Harbour.

The Coral Coast is home to a number of attractions that will appeal to kids. Take them for a beachside horse ride at **Natadola Beach** (p160) or show them Fiji's less-domesticated wildlife at the excellent **Kula Eco Park** (p163).

The **Fiji Museum** (p166) is choc-full of cultural and historical exhibits (including cannibal utensils – *eeewwww!*) that will capture inquisitive young minds. You can also take them for a dip with local families

at the **Suva Olympic Swimming Pool** (p167) and then have a swing on the monkey bars at the family-infested **Umaria Park** (p169). The picnic tables at this esplanade playground make it perfect for a lunch pit stop.

Off the northern coast, **Nananu-i-Ra** (p176) is only a short hop from the mainland and offers calm swimming and snorkelling, and a good amount of self-catering accommodation. Kids can also participate in kayaking and windsurfing here.

TOURS

Day trips and cruises to the stunning Mamanuca and Yasawa Group islands are understandably popular. Malololailai, Mana, Beachcomber and Castaway usually take day-trippers. See p180 and p185 for more information.

Based at Stoney Creek Resort (p154), **Wacking Stick Adventure Tours** (Map pp148-97; ☎ 672 4673, 995 3003; www.wackingstickadventures.com) offers excellent mountain-biking tours into the highlands from F\$120/135 per half-day/day.

The easiest way to visit the majestic Viti Levu Highlands is on a tour. **Mount Batilamu Trek** (☎ 664 5747, 927 3592; fax 664 5547; per person F\$360; Tue & Thu mid-Apr–mid-Nov) organises 2½-day tours up the Sabeto Valley, which stretches between Nadi and Lautoka. Accommodation is in villages and tours include meals, drinks and transfers from Nadi and Lautoka hotels.

Additional highland tours picking up from Nadi:

Mountain View Tours (☎ 651 3620) Sightseeing and trekking tours for small groups from F\$130/240 per person for one-day/three-day tours.

HINDU SYMBOLISM

Tiny Hindu temples and shrines dot the Fijian countryside, each one symbolising the body or residence of the soul. For Hindus, union with God can be achieved through prayer and by ridding the body of impurities – hence no meat in the belly or shoes on the feet when entering a temple.

Inside the temples Hindus give symbolic offerings and blessings to their many gods. Water and flowers symbolise the Great Mother who personifies nature, while burning camphor represents the light of knowledge and understanding. Smashing a coconut denotes cracking humans' three weaknesses: egotism (the hard shell), delusion (the fibre) and material attachments (the outermost covering). The white kernel and sweet water represent the pure soul within.

Hindus believe that a body enslaved to the spirit and denied all comforts will become one with the Great Mother. Life is compared to walking on fire: a disciplined approach, like that required in the firewalking ceremony, leads to balance, self-acceptance and the ability to see good in all.

Rivers Fiji (Map pp148-97; ☎ 345 0147; www.riversfiji.com) River-rafting and kayaking trips to the Namosi Highlands from F\$190 per person.

Rosie Holidays (Map p152; ☎ 672 2935; www.rosiefiji.com) Nausori Highland day treks per person F\$80.

NADI

pop 30,900

Fiji's main tourist hub is a bit of everything to locals and a lot of nothing to visitors. This town-cum-city-cum-business centre is really an ever-growing urban sprawl, littered with hotels to accommodate the constant flow of travellers heading in or out. The population resides in several villages strung out along dusty patches of Queens Rd, and the northern horizon is dominated by the hazy Nausori Highlands.

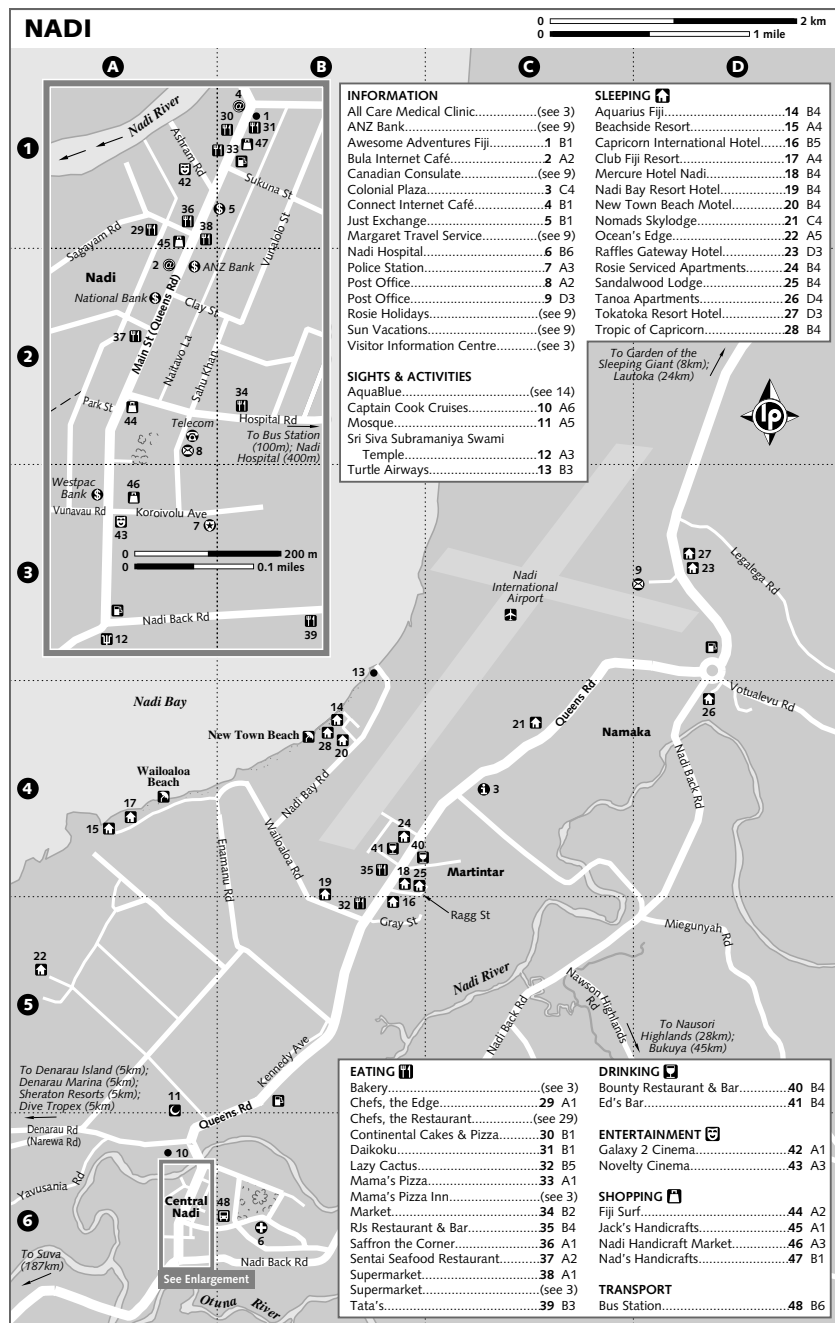
While uninspiring, Nadi is a convenient base to organise trips around Viti Levu or to offshore islands. 'Downtown' is a kilometre or so of shopping, eating and other commercial options, and a good place to grab last-minute gifts before heading home.

Nadi makes no bones about the fact that it's the antithesis of island paradise; once you get your head around where it's coming from, you're likely to enjoy the place more fully.

Sights

SRI SIVA SUBRAMANIYA SWAMI TEMPLE

Striking a vibrant pose against a dramatic mountainous backdrop, this peaceful Hindu temple (☎ 670 0016; admission F\$3.50; ☎ 5am-8pm daily) leaves the hustle of Main St far in its wake. The soothing grounds are an excellent spot to contemplate philosophical theories... or just chill for a while. The temple itself



is decorated with carved wooden deities that travelled all the way from India, along with the artists who painted the multihued exterior and vivid frescoes.

This is a Murugan temple and worship of Lord Murugan is equivalent to the worship of nature. He is the guardian deity of the seasonal rains.

Visitors are welcome as long as they're dressed modestly and haven't consumed alcohol or meat that day. Don't snap photos inside the temple.

GARDEN OF THE SLEEPING GIANT

This beautiful garden (☎ 672 2701; Wailoko Rd; adult/child/family F\$12/6/30; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-moon Sun) is a tribute to the orchid, boasting dozens of varieties of the colourful flower amid a sea of tropical vegetation. Tucked beneath the foothills of the Sabeto mountain range, the garden offers visitors a network of walking tracks, lily ponds and perfect picnic spots. To get here, travel along the Queens Rd for about 6km north of Nadi airport and turn east onto Wailoko Rd for a further 2km. A taxi from Nadi will cost around F\$13.

Activities

DIVING

There are three good diving outfits in the Nadi area, all of which visit dive sites in the Mamanucas and come with excellent reputations:

AquaBlue (☎ 672 6111; www.aquabluefiji.com; Lot 33, Wasawasa Rd, New Town Beach, Nadi) One-/two-tank dives F\$120/160, PADI open water course F\$500.

Dive Tropex (☎ 675 0944; www.divetropex.com; Sheraton Fiji Resort, Denarau) One-/two-tank dives F\$120/185, PADI open water course F\$670.

Subsurface Fiji (Map pp148-97; ☎ 666 6738; www.subsurfacefiji.com) Based at the First Landing Resort (p156), a two-tank dive/PADI open water course costs F\$190/560.

GOLF & TENNIS

The **Denarau Golf & Racquet Club** (☎ 675 9711; info@denaragolf.com.fj; Denarau Island) has an immaculately groomed 18-hole golf course with bunkers in the shape of sea creatures. Green fees are F\$70/110 for nine/18 holes. A game of tennis costs F\$25 per hour on a synthetic or grass court. Racquet hire is F\$12 per person.

Nadi Airport Golf Club (☎ 672 2148; New Town Beach, Nadi) is a cheaper option at F\$15 for 18 holes. Clubs and pull-cart are an extra F\$30.

SCENIC FLIGHTS

On a clear day, most domestic flights offer gorgeous views of islands, coral reefs and blue-green waters. Easy day trips include Nadi to Malololailai and Mana in the Mamanucas (confirm in advance to use resort facilities).

Charter services and joy flights:

Island Hoppers (☎ 672 0410; info@helicopters.com.fj) Helicopter transfers and flights to Malololailai or Castaway (one way per person F\$210), 20-minute Sabeto Range flights (F\$170 per seat for four to six passengers).

Pacific Island Seaplanes (☎ 672 5644; www.fijisea planes.com) Transfers to the Mamanuca (Castaway Island F\$190), Yasawa and Lau Groups.

Turtle Airways (☎ 672 1888; reservations@turtleair ways.com) Scenic flights and transfers to the Mamanucas and Turtle Island. Contact the company for rates.

Sleeping

The black-sand New Town and Wailoaloa Beaches will disappoint anyone with visions of a tropical isle, but these areas are quiet and peaceful and have some of the best accommodation options. Closer to town, there's a scattering of hotels along the highway and in Martintar which have easy access to buses in and out of downtown.

BUDGET

New Town Beach

Aquarius Fiji (☎ 672 6000; www.aquarius.com.fj; 17 Wasawasa Rd; dm F\$25-28, d F\$80-90; ☎ ☎ ☎) A professional setup, with a good restaurant and bar, and pool area stretching languidly onto the beach. Hammocks strung between palms beckon sun addicts, and there's a central TV room for wet weather. Doubles are cheerful and sunny and those upstairs have balconies overlooking the beach. Dorms are en suite and comfortable.

Tropic of Capricorn (☎ 672 3089; chopkins@bigpond .net.au; 11 Wasawasa Rd; dm/s/d F\$15/30/40; ☎ ☎ ☎) Run by 'Mama', who knows a thing or 50 about Fiji and adopts all guests like stray kittens, this homy lodge sits on a patch of beach with tidy dorms and a central dining area. Spacious singles and doubles are in a two-storey house around the corner with shared facilities.

New Town Beach Motel (☎ 672 3339; newtown beach@connect.com.fj; 5 Wasawasa Rd; r/f F\$40/50; ☎ ☎) Perfect for travellers looking for budget tariffs without the hype, this small and unassuming motel is nestled behind a fold of

trees. The fan-cooled rooms are neat, petite and lovely, and the small restaurant (mains F\$10) serves simple and filling fare.

Along the Highway

Sandalwood Lodge (☎ 672 2044; sandalwood@connect.com.fj; Ragg St, Martintar; s F\$75-95, d/tw F\$85-105; ☎ ☎ ☎) A budget option in a midrange shell, this lodge has self-contained rooms with perky décor, kitchenettes and TVs. Ground-floor rooms have patios leading to the pool, and those upstairs have larger interiors and balconies. The location off the main road promises a good night's sleep.

Nadi Bay Resort Hotel (☎ 672 3599; www.fiji.nadibayhotel.com; Wailoaloa Rd; dm F\$21-25, s F\$60-80, d F\$80-100, st F\$120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Perennially busy, the Nadi Bay is a one-stop backpacker hub with a range of dorms, doubles and suites, two excellent restaurants (mains F\$10 to F\$20), two bars, a palm-fringed pool and a smorgasbord of other facilities. It accommodates a sizeable clientele of 18- to 35-year-olds, and the atmosphere can be a little impersonal, but couples and groups love it.

Nomads Skylodge (☎ 672 2200; www.nomadsky.lodge.com.fj; Queens Hwy, Namaka; 8-/6-/4-bed dm F\$22/24/26, d F\$35-120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Something of a camp for grown-ups, this lodge has neat and plain dorms, spartan twins and air-conditioned bathrooms with phone and TV, all scattered throughout grassy grounds. There are also basketball and volleyball courts, and it's popular with tour groups.

Other Areas

Stoney Creek Resort (Map pp148-97; ☎ 672 2206; www.stoneycreekfiji.net; reservations@stoneycreekfiji.net; Sabeto Rd; dm F\$20, s/d without bathroom F\$30/45, d/tr with bathroom F\$55/75; ☎ ☎) Hidden at the base of the highlands, this resort has a taste of the Wild West with cosy dorms in mock train carriages and doubles with sweeping views in cute and private *bure*. There's a saloon-style bar and restaurant (meals F\$6 to F\$10) and a good range of activities on offer. The resort provides a free airport shuttle.

Rendezvous Beach Resort (Map pp148-97; ☎ 651 0571; www.surfdivefiji.com; Uciwai Landing; camping per person F\$35, dm/s/d F\$55/75/140; ☎ ☎) The air is thick with the scent of board wax, sunblock and ocean lingo at this surfer retreat that offers minimal bungalows and oodles of grass

to pitch a tent. Boat transfers to the Manuca surf breaks cost F\$50 per day and a two-tank dive/PADI open water course costs F\$150/500. Transfers from the airport are F\$40.

MIDRANGE

Wailoaloa Beach

Club Fiji Resort (☎ 670 20150; www.clubfiji-resort.com; Wailoaloa Beach Rd; d F\$100-165; ☎ ☎ ☎) A lively option for midrangers looking to avoid the big resorts, Club Fiji has classy Mediterranean-style villas, ocean-view *bure*, and smaller timber and thatched *bure*. All digs are decent value and the on-site restaurant (mains F\$12 to F\$30) hosts Mexican, Mongolian and Fijian theme nights and live entertainment.

Ocean's Edge (☎ 651 1560; www.oceansedge.org; Fantasy Forest Park; d F\$150; ☎ ☎) Tucked away in a slowly progressing residential estate, this health and fitness complex has four trendy units with timber decks and edgy-urban interiors. Access to the pristine pool and gym are included in the price, but you'll need a car to reach anything else.

Along the Highway

Raffles Gateway Hotel (☎ 672 2444; www.affles.gateway.com; Queens Rd; d F\$70-130; ☎ ☎ ☎)

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Beachside Resort (☎ 670 3488; www.beachsidesortfiji.com; Wailoaloa Beach Rd; d F\$60-90, f F\$125; ☎ ☎ ☎) Actually it's not quite Beachside – it's more like Beach-near. This small and personal resort may have a cheeky moniker, but the appealing digs, helpful staff, tidy grounds and funky restaurant atone. Stylish and immaculate rooms with polished tiled floors and plenty of natural light are dressed in timber and Fijian prints. The more expensive versions have balconies overlooking the pool and alfresco dining area, while cheaper (but no less classy) rooms are tucked behind the main complex. The compact grounds have a small splay of poolside sun lounges where you can sup on a freshly blended fruit cocktail. The resort's trendy Coriander Café (mains F\$12 to F\$24) dishes up inventive fare along the lines of Thai chicken pizza or coconut fish bites.

This well-established hotel with an expansive central lawn is opposite the airport. The rooms are good value regardless of the location; the small standard versions are cool and crisp, and pricier superior rooms have lounge settings and patios. There's also a poolside restaurant (mains F\$20 to F\$30) and kids will love the water slide.

Capricorn International Hotel (☎ 672 0088; www.capricorn-hotels-fiji.com; Queens Rd, Martintar; r F\$85-110, f F\$160; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Capricorn's colourful and pleasant rooms are a tad dated but all have mod cons and gargantuan beds. Pricier deluxe models come with a balcony. The two-bedroom family suite is good value for a small army, and the property includes a spacious restaurant (mains F\$10 to F\$25), laundry service, salon and small shop. Rates include breakfast.

Mercury Hotel Nadi (☎ 672 2438/2255; reservations@mercurenadi.com.fj; r F\$135; ☎ ☎ ☎) Renovated and fancied up into a flashy haven of creature comforts, the Mercury offers large 'deluxe' and modern 'superior' rooms, all of which have bar fridges, TVs and sassy bathrooms. Families populate the grassy grounds, which include a sizeable pool and alfresco restaurant (mains F\$20).

Rosie Serviced Apartments (☎ 672 2755; reservations@rosie.com.fj; Queens Rd, Martintar; r F\$70-115; ☎ ☎) Persevere past the confronting brick exterior and you'll find meticulously maintained studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments which are great value for self-caterers. The décor could do with a lift but there's enough room in even the studios to accommodate a small nation and each apartment has a balcony.

TOP END

Near the Airport

Tanoa Apartments (☎ 672 3685; www.tanoahotels.com; off Votualevu Rd, Namaka; r/st F\$170/215; ☎ ☎ ☎) This lofty complex exudes mountain vibes with cool stone walls, arched wooden doors and superb apartments catering to the self-contained sophisticate. Ample windows in each provide plenty of natural light and sweeping highland views, and the interiors contain modern kitchens, cushioned window benches and classy décor.

Tokatoka Resort Hotel (☎ 672 0222; tokatokaresort@connect.com.fj; Queens Rd, Nadi; r F\$175-230; ☎ ☎ ☎) Low-rise but high-class, Tokatoka

has top-end trimmings without the usual sea of concrete and steel. Polished and semidetached villas are peppered throughout expansive grounds, thick with tropical vegetation. Some are self-contained and the wealth of facilities include a restaurant (mains F\$15 to F\$30), health spa and water slide.

Denarau

Denarau is awash with Sheraton flair, each of the three flashy resorts having distinctive style and all the five-star perks. Couples, package holdovers and families constitute the bulk of guests, and the latter are well catered for with a daily entertainment programme for children and a baby-sitting service. In addition, there are 18 restaurants, a bevy of bars and plenty of activities. Industrious construction is expanding this resort island, with more top-end options in the making.

West Bus Transport (☎ 675 0777) has six buses daily (less frequently on Sunday) from Nadi bus station to Denarau Island. A taxi from downtown costs F\$12; one from Nadi airport costs F\$24.

Sheraton Royal Denarau Resort (☎ 675 0000; fax 675 0818; sheratondenarau@sheraton.com; r incl breakfast from F\$630; ☎ ☎ ☎) Although it's the oldest of the chain, this resort is the most Fijian-flavoured of the group. Hotel rooms are casually splendid and come with all wonders of modern technology. The resort itself is tucked into a beautifully maintained tropical garden.

Sheraton Fiji Resort (☎ 675 0777; www.sheraton.com/fiji; r incl breakfast from F\$540; ☎ ☎ ☎) *Trés chic* with a splash of the Mediterranean, these condos have ocean views and plenty of panache. Blocks are separated by grassy lawns and colourful flora. Seasonal price variations provide some great deals and advance booking is likely to reduce the rack rate considerably.

Sheraton Denarau Villas (☎ 675 0777; www.sheraton.com/denaravillas; r incl breakfast from F\$640, st incl breakfast from F\$870; ☎ ☎ ☎) The classiest of the lot, the Sheraton Villas are a series of modern one-, two- and three-bedroom bungalows with opulent interiors and small kitchens. The 'infinity' pool is unbearably blue, you can pamper yourself in the Mandara Spa and the staff wait on you hand and foot.

Sonaisali Island

Sonaisali Island Resort (Map pp148-97; ☎ 670 6011; www.sonaisali.com; r incl breakfast F\$420, st incl breakfast from F\$580; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This fancy resort occupies an entire (teeny) island and offers comfortable (if a little predictable) hotel rooms with sea views. Voluminous suites are in thatched *bure* with high ceilings and elevated verandas. On-site is a beauty spa, poolside restaurant (meal package F\$65/35 per adult/child), free kids' club and more activities than you could possibly exhaust.

Naisali is a 25-minute drive and three-minute boat shuttle from Nadi airport. Turn off the Queens Rd at Nacobi Rd and drive for a couple of kilometres by sealed road to the resort landing and taxi stand.

Other Areas

First Landing Resort (Map pp148-97; ☎ 666 6171; www.firstlandingfiji.com; Vuda Point; r incl breakfast F\$145-220, st incl breakfast F\$440-520; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Bursting with Australian, NZ and American package tourists, this brochure-perfect resort treats its guests to *bure* and two-bedroom villas with cheerful décor, tiled bathrooms and bedrooms, and mosquito-screened verandas. An abundance of palms and foliage keeps the ambience tropical, and the lagoon-style pool compensates for a lacklustre beach.

Eating

Although small, Nadi caters to travellers' palates well with a decent variety of Indian, Chinese and Western cuisine, with many restaurants serving at least a couple of traditional Fijian dishes.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Tata's (☎ 670 0520; Nadi Back Rd, Nadi; meals F\$4; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) You won't find this unadorned little curry house on any of the tourist brochures and its location ain't salubrious, but Tata's serves some of the best and hottest curry in the country. It's legendary among the locals.

Continental Cakes & Pizza (☎ 670 3595; Main St, Nadi; meals F\$6-16; ☎ 8am-6pm) This long, narrow café lures locals and visitors with its fresh, deli-style sandwiches, pies and pizzas. Sponge cakes and other sweet goodies flaunt themselves under a glass cabinet and the coffee here is burly.

Saffron the Corner (☎ 670 1233; Main St, Nadi; mains F\$8; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Delicious curries served in one-meal-a-day portions display themselves under the counter at this corner diner. The ambience is a tad fast-food chain and you'll need to contend with Hindi tunes butchered by a drum machine, but it's a good spot for a mountainous feed.

RESTAURANTS

Chefs, the Restaurant (☎ 670 3131/3322; Sagayam Rd, Nadi; mains F\$30-45; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A Nadi institution, swanky Chefs is perfect for a splurge on taste and atmosphere. Meals match the refined surrounds and the global menu offers imaginative duckling ravioli, salmon and king prawns or Afghan chicken.

Daikoku (☎ 670 3622; Main St, Nadi; mains F\$20-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Perched around large square hot plates, patrons sip Asahi beer while their individual chefs perform the sometimes gentle, sometimes energetic, but always entertaining art of teppanyaki on exquisite chicken, beef and seafood dishes. There is also delicate sushi or sashimi for starters. Bookings recommended.

First Landing Seafood Restaurant (☎ 666 6171; www.firstlandingfiji.com; Vuda Point; mains F\$16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This resort restaurant is worth the trip for the excellent seafood, although the accompanying pastas, burgers and other resort-style food is fairly timid. It all goes down pretty well at the outdoor seating, which offers uninterrupted views of the Mamanucas.

Chefs, the Edge (☎ 670 3131; Sagayam Rd, Nadi; mains F\$16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The café version of the restaurant upstairs has

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lazy Cactus (☎ 672 6890; Queens Rd, Martintar; mains F\$12-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) This snappy little cantina oozes a warm atmosphere, south of the border charm and delicious smells. The food is Mexican and it mean business: burritos, enchiladas, tortillas and other faves are up for grabs. But so too is a kicking *camarones en mojo de ajo* (shrimp with garlic, chillies and butter) and a chilli salt squid that leaves a sizzling reminder on your lips. You can dine inside or in the pleasant courtyard.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ed's Bar (☎ 672 4650; Lot 51, Queens Rd, Martintar) The place to hit the bitters in Nadi, Ed's is something of an institution/old friend/personality all of its own. Most nights it lures a buzzing and mixed crowd of tourists, locals and expats (is there anyone else left?) who return for the cheap beer and über-friendly bar staff. It's more than just a watering hole though – live bands often hit the boards in the main bar, and there's a small restaurant (mains F\$8 to F\$10) attached. A handful of breezy tables adorns the front entrance but you'll need to get your beer boots in early to beat the garrulous crowd.

a roomy and relaxed interior and serves pizza, pasta, salads and burgers. Best of all are the Thai and Indian curries and the blessed air-con cools that Vindaloo sting.

Sentai Seafood Restaurant (☎ 670 0928; Main St, Nadi; mains F\$12-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) The décor may be shambolic but Sentai's Asian-infused menu is deliberate and delish. There's a heavy emphasis on seafood and adventurous souls can tuck into sea cucumber combination hotpots. For the meek there's beef in black bean sauce or prawns with lemon and ginger.

Also recommended:

Mama's Pizza (Downtown ☎ 670 0221; Main St, Nadi; Namaka ☎ 672 0922; Colonial Plaza, Queens Rd; mains F\$8-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Traditional crowd-pleasers, plus woodfired gourmet treats.

RJs Restaurant & Bar (☎ 672 2900; Queens Rd, Martintar; mains F\$20-30; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Good steaks, char-grills and seafood.

SELF-CATERING

Nadi has a large produce **market** (Hospital Rd), with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. There are several large supermarkets and bakeries downtown, including at the Colonial Plaza.

Drinking

Bounty Restaurant & Bar (☎ 672 0840; 79 Queens Rd, Martintar) This convivial bar/restaurant is thick with seafaring kitsch and hosts a solid drinking phase somewhere between dinner and the live music. Things get loud, beery and fun as the night draws on. Popular with expats.

The bars at Aquarius Fiji (p153) and Nadi Bay Resort Hotel (p154) are atmospheric options for a beer or cocktail.

Entertainment

Planters Lounge (☎ 675 0000; sheratondenarau@sheraton.com) Inside the Sheraton Royal (p155),

this sweeping cocktail bar features live Fijian music nightly. On Wednesday night you can catch fire-walking, and on Saturday nights a *meke* (F\$50/25 per adult/child over 12, including a *lovo* dinner).

Two downtown cinemas showing a mix of Hollywood and Indian Bollywood movies are **Galaxy 2 Cinema** (☎ 670 0176; 5 Ashram Rd, Nadi) and **Novelty Cinema** (☎ 670 0155; Main St, Nadi). Admission is around F\$4.

Shopping

Nadi's Main St is a tribute to souvenir and duty-free shops.

Jack's Handicrafts (☎ 670 0744; Main St, Nadi) This colossal outlet of Jack's sells touristy crafts, clothing, jewellery and items for the home at reasonable prices but it's all fairly mass-produced.

Nadi Handicraft Market (Koroivolu Ave, Nadi) You'll have a better chance of finding something unique here, but check the prices in the shops beforehand to ensure you really are getting a bargain. Wooden items are unlikely to have been treated and may require quarantine.

Fiji Surf (☎ 670 5960; cnr Main St & Hospital Rd, Nadi) This little surf shop sells trendy surf wear, boards and equipment. It also repairs and rents boards and can be a good source of information for general surf conditions.

More souvenirs:

Nad's Handicrafts (☎ 670 3588; Main St, Nadi) Similar stock and prices to Jack's.

Pacific Art Shop (☎ 675 0677; Sheraton Fiji Resort, Denarau) High-quality goods at higher prices.

Getting There & Around

See p215 for information on getting to and from Nadi by bus. Regular local and express buses travel along Queens Rd to New Town Beach and Denarau Island (see p155). Taxis are plentiful in Nadi, but they don't use meters; agree on a price before getting in.

LAUTOKA

pop 43,274

Fiji's second-largest city belies its urban rank with corridors of thick foliage, ambling wide streets and a deliciously relaxed ambience. Although it lacks the substance for an extended stay, Lautoka has a small botanical gardens and a large produce and handicraft market, and is a pleasant alternative to Nadi. It also has one of Fiji's strongest concentrations of Indo-Fijian culture, and the downtown grid teems with swaying saris and aromatic curry houses.

The **Lautoka Sugar Mill** has been operating here since 1903 and the local economy still relies heavily on the diminishing sugar industry. In cutting season, sugar trains putt

along the main street and in September the city crowns a Sugar Queen at the annual Sugar Festival.

Sleeping

Waterfront Hotel (☎ 666 4777; waterfront@connect.com.fj; Marine Dve; d F\$120-140; ☒ ☒ ☒) Lautoka's top hotel has a waterfront location and the ambience and trimmings of a midrange US hotel chain. Spacious rooms have balconies and generic and cheerful décor. On site is a gym, small children's playground, bar and restaurant (see opposite).

Lautoka Hotel (☎ 666 0388; ltkhotel@connect.com.fj; 2-12 Naviti St; dm F\$15, d F\$35-65; ☒ ☒) This gracious corner hotel may have lost some of its kick but the neat and cosy rooms are

still distinguished enough to put a smile on your face. Pricier versions have air-con, private bathrooms and TVs, and there's a sweeping balcony upstairs which provides great views of the street below.

Sea Breeze Hotel (☎ 666 0717; fax 666 6080; Bekana Lane; s F\$35-50, d F\$40-55; ☒ ☒ ☒) Tucked down an alley near the city centre, this hotel has piously austere rooms (embellished only by the bedside Bible) which provide spotless and tranquil sanctuary. The more expensive sea-view rooms with air-con are the nicest. There's also a TV lounge, a bar and a restaurant that serves breakfast (F\$4 to F\$10).

Saweni Beach Apartment Hotel (☎ 666 1777; www.fiji4less.com; dm F\$17, st F\$80-100; ☒ ☒ ☒) Around 8km south of town, this beach-side resort has bungalow-style apartments with simple interiors, modern kitchens and oodles of room. There's also one opulent beach house (F\$380) if you're looking to splurge. It's a great option for families and self-caterers but you'll need a car to enjoy the area.

More options:

Bekana Garden Island Resort (Map pp148-97; ☎ 664 0180; www.bekanaislandfiji.com.fj; d F\$125-280; ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) Sassy, family-friendly island resort.

Cathay Hotel (☎ 666 0566; www.fiji4less.com; Tavewa Ave; dm/d from F\$14/40; ☒ ☒) Weary but good for a cheap doss.

Eating

Chilli Tree Café (☎ 665 1824; 3 Tukani St; meals F\$6-12; ☒ breakfast & lunch) This corner café satiates fussy palates with fabulous muffins, focaccias, quiches, wraps, cakes and great coffee. The interior is more nanna than nouveau but the 180-degree windows make for great people watching.

Nan Ying (☎ 665 2668; Nede St; mains F\$12-20; ☒ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) This diminutive restaurant sizzles up some of the finest seafood dishes in Fiji – coconut crab, baked lobster or salt-and-pepper fried prawns to name a few. Fragrant poultry and noodle dishes also grace the menu.

Seaview Restaurant (☎ 666 0388; cnr Naviti & Tui Sts; mains F\$10-20; ☒ lunch & dinner) Beneath the Lautoka Hotel, the Seaview has an extensive menu, serving fresh seafood, Fijian dishes, triple-decker club sandwiches, roasts and more. The cool interior has low lighting and lacklustre furniture but the convivial

vibes and excellent food more than compensate. It's also a pleasant spot for a predinner drink.

Vrindavan Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 666 2990; 88 Naviti St; meals F\$4-7.50; ☒ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Wed, to 6.30pm Thu & Fri, to 5pm Sat) This clean and bright Indian eatery serves good vegetarian curries and thalis, as well as colourful and delicious Indian sweets. The spacious interior is laid out like a diner.

Fins Restaurant (☎ 666 4777; Marine Dve; mains F\$12-25; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the Waterfront Hotel (see opposite), this cosmopolitan restaurant serves salads, BLTs, Thai curries and good Fijian dishes. The menu caters to tourist tastes and the interior is flashy and cool. On breezy days the outside tables with waterfront views are the very best seats in town.

Other dining options:

Jolly Good (cnr Naviti & Vakabale Sts; meals F\$3.50-5.50; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Tasty takeaway in an alfresco setting.

Ganga Vegetarian Restaurant (cnr Naviti & Yasawa Sts; meals F\$2-5; ☒ breakfast & lunch) Good vegetarian curries.

Drinking & Entertainment

Lautoka has a limited number of pubs and clubs, which generally veer towards the seadier side.

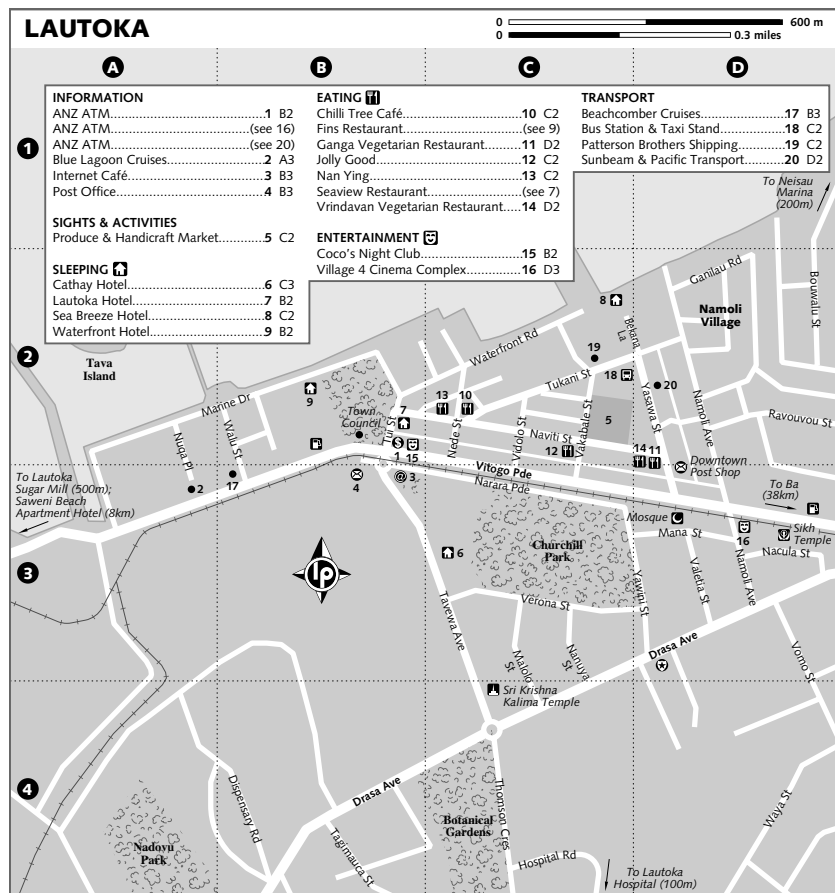
Coco's Night Club (☎ 666 8989; 151 Vitogo Pde) Probably the most welcoming club in town, Coco's puts on live music most Friday and Saturday nights, as well as happy hours nightly (5pm to 9pm).

Village 4 cinema complex (Namoli Ave) Hollywood and Bollywood are screened in harmony at Lautoka's main cinema. Tickets are F\$4, except on Tuesday, when they're F\$3.50.

Getting There & Around

Local buses shuttle between Lautoka and Nadi every 15 minutes during the day (F\$2) and less frequently in the evening, as well as to and from Saweni Beach (F\$1, 45 minutes, six daily). There are also regular buses along the Kings Rd.

Sunbeam Transport and Pacific Transport also have frequent bus services to and from Nadi (F\$2.80, 1½ hours) and Suva (F\$13, six hours). Both companies have offices in Yasawa St, opposite the market, where you can pick up timetables.



Lautoka is easy to get around on foot. Taxis are plentiful and short rides are cheap. A taxi will cost approximately F\$8/25 from Saweni to Lautoka or Nadi airport.

SOUTHERN VITI LEVU & THE CORAL COAST

South of Nadi the sealed and scenic Queens Rd winds through cane fields and sidles up to Viti Levu's southern coast. This region is peppered with small towns and accommodation options, particularly along the stretch of coastline known as the Coral Coast. Between Sigatoka and Pacific Harbour the road is flanked by waves of green hills on one side and a fringing reef that drops off dramatically into the deep blue of the South Pacific Ocean on the other.

Momi Bay

The first interesting detour south of Nadi is towards Momi Bay along the old unsealed Queens Rd. The turn-off is 18km from Nadi.

En route you'll pass the **Momi Guns** (adult/child/family F\$3/1/6; ☎ 9am-5pm), an evocative WWII battery on a hilltop about 6km from the Queens Rd turn-off. The restored bunkers and fine collection of photos provide a tangible sense of the site's history and the views to the Navula Passage, Malolo Barrier Reef and Mamanuca islands are quite breathtaking.

SLEEPING & EATING

Seashell Surf & Dive Resort (☎ 670 6100; www.seashellresort.com; camping F\$10, dm incl meals F\$60, s/d F\$40/65 ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This isolated resort has grassy grounds with unadorned but comfortable dorms and lodge rooms, and classier self-contained *bure*. Lodge room number 1 will get you ocean views. The beach itself isn't spectacular, but it's family friendly and the activities include diving (two-tank dive/PADI open water course F\$170/550) and surfing.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Head 11km down Old Queens Rd, turn right and continue for another 1.5km. Airport transfers/taxis from Nadi are F\$15/50 each way (45 minutes). Local buses travel to and from Nadi (F\$2, one hour, three daily) and Sigatoka (F\$3, one hour, 1.30pm daily).

Robinson Crusoe Island

This small coral island, also known as Likuri, is just off Natadola Beach.

Budget travellers swarm to the **Robinson Crusoe Island Resort** (☎ 651 0100; www.robinsoncrusoeislandfiji.com; dm/s/d from F\$70/90/170; ☎) for dizzy fun loosely packaged in a cultural wrapping. Accommodation is in basic thatched private *bure* or large dorms, all of which share bathrooms. There's a gorgeous white-sand beachfront and an intense (and slightly tacky) entertainment programme. Buffet meals are included in the rate and activities include windsurfing, snorkelling and diving (two-tank dive/PADI open water course F\$120/450). There are day trips from Nadi and Coral Coast hotels (F\$90 per person), but staying overnight is better value. Coach and boat transfers to and from Nadi cost F\$70.

Natadola Beach

With a wide stretch of soft sand and several kilometres of pristine surf, Natadola is Viti Levu's best beach. Unlike surrounding beaches flanked by coral, Natadola provides good swimming regardless of the tide level and there is frequently enough churn for body surfing. Take care though, as the currents and undertow can be dangerous. For nonswimmers Natadola is an utterly photogenic spot to zone out, but watch your valuables as there have been reports of theft.

Local villagers offer **horse riding** (F\$10) along the beach, but they can be pushy. If you don't want to take them up on their offer, issue a firm but polite 'no thank you' and put some distance between you and the car park.

SLEEPING & EATING

Natadola Beach Resort (☎ 651 1251; www.natadola.com; d incl breakfast F\$250; ☎) This intimate resort injects a soft splash of Spain into Fiji and skips the mod cons, opting for privacy and class instead. Plump chairs and beds, cool wooden interiors and secluded courtyards should satiate all urges to escape civilisation. The restaurant (mains F\$10 to F\$25) serves great seafood and is open to nonguests.

Mia and Sara (☎ 651 0926; incl meals F\$35-40) In the nearby village of Sanasana, Mia and Sara are a married couple who offer

A HAIRY SITUATION

For indigenous Fijians the head is *tabu*. In reverence to this sanctity, Fijians once spent entire days with the hairdresser. As a symbol of masculinity and social standing, men sported flamboyant, often massive hairdos, ranging from the relatively conventional giant puffball (up to 30cm tall) to more original shaggy or geometric shapes. Styles were stiffened into place with burnt limejuice and dyed grey, blue, orange, yellow and white, sometimes striped or multicoloured. Women, on the other hand, wore far more conservative hairdos – close-cropped with random tufts dyed rusty brown or yellow. A wife's hair could never outdo her husband's and a husband's could not outdo the chief's.

People slept on uncomfortable-looking wooden pillows to keep their coiffure from being spoilt. The head was specially dressed for festive occasions with accessories like hair scratchers (practical for lice), ornamental combs, scarlet feathers, flowers and grated sandalwood. Shaving one's head was a profound sacrifice for a man and often done as a symbol of mourning or to appease a wrathful ancestral spirit.

Early Europeans were astonished by the variety of elaborate styles. Soon after a missionary measured one hairdo at 5m in circumference, the custom was deliberately suppressed by Christians who regarded the practice as not suitable for the 'neat and industrious Christian convert'.

hospitable homestay accommodation. To book, call them on the only phone in the village between 10am and 1pm. Ask for Mia or Sara, then call back in 10 minutes to speak to them.

The **InterContinental** (www.natadolafiji.com) group commenced construction of a lavish new five-star resort at Natadola in September 2005.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Paradise Transport buses head to and from Sigatoka (F\$2.50, one hour, four daily Monday to Friday). The Maro Rd turn-off heads south to Natadola off Queens Rd, 36km from Nadi, just past the police post; the beach is signposted.

The Coral Coast Scenic Railway (see below) runs tours to the beach. Keen walkers could follow the track between Yanuca and Natadola Beach (about 3½ hours) and then catch the train or bus back.

Yanuca & Around

Past the turn-off to Natadola, Queens Rd winds southeast through hills and down to the coast at Cuvu Bay and Yanuca – a blink of a village which is home to a couple of good attractions and in close proximity to Sigatoka. There is also a small island named Yanuca where the Shangri-La's Fijian Resort resides.

The station for the **Coral Coast Scenic Railway** (☎ 652 8731; Queens Rd) is at the causeway entrance to the Fijian Resort. It offers scenic

rides on an old diesel sugar train, past villages, forests and sugar plantations, to Natadola Beach. The 14km trip takes about 1¼ hours, leaving at 10am and returning at 4pm (F\$80 including BBQ lunch).

Ka Levu South Pacific Cultural Centre (☎ 652 0200; admission 1hr/day F\$25/100; dm incl meals F\$65, d & tw F\$75, r F\$90-135) is a faux-Fijian village featuring cultural dancing, kava ceremonies, handicrafts and cooking. You can stay overnight in neat dorms and doubles with shared bathrooms or choose a crisp hotel room or spacious self-contained unit. All rates include tours. Also on-site is Bernie's Bar and Gecko's Restaurant (mains F\$15 to F\$30), which cooks up great steaks and fish curries.

The sprawling five-star **Shangri-La's Fijian Resort** (☎ 652 0155; www.shangri-la.com; d incl breakfast from F\$490; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) occupies the entire island of Yanuca (43 hectares) and is perfect for families seeking pure R&R and indulgence. Two children can share with parents for free and there's a great child-care centre. You can laze by one of the three palm-skirted pools or enjoy a bout of golf, tennis, jet skiing, parasailing, snorkelling, water-skiing, fishing or even cycling.

The Fijian Resort is about a 45-minute drive from Nadi and 11km west of Sigatoka. Regular express buses, minibuses and carriers travel along Queens Rd (see p215). A taxi to Nadi airport is about F\$70 and the Coral Sun Fiji coach is F\$15.

Sigatoka & Around

pop 8000

Sigatoka is a neat grid of a town tucked into green and fertile surrounds near the mouth of the large Sigatoka River. It makes for a pleasant amble and pit stop but largely acts as a service town for the Coral Coast region. There's a produce market, a few souvenir shops and a large hilltop mosque. An inordinate number of taxis populate the streets so you shouldn't have any difficulty travelling the very short distance from A to B.

SIGHTS

Sigatoka Sand Dunes

Windswept and peppered with sheets of grey sand, these impressive **dunes** (adult/child/family F\$8/3/20; ☎ 8am-6pm) are one of Fiji's natural highlights. Several million years in the making, they stand around 5km long, up to 1km wide and on average about 20m high, rising to about 60m at the western end. Archaeological excavations have uncovered one of the largest burial sites in the Pacific, as well as pottery over 2600 years old. A mahogany forest was planted in the 1960s to halt the dunes' expedition onto the Queens Rd, and the state-owned part of the area was declared a national park in 1989 in an attempt to help preserve the site.

The dunes are quite spectacular and a great place for a walk. On a hot day visit before 11am or after 3pm. Enter through the Sigatoka Sand Dunes Visitor Centre, 4.5km west of Sigatoka, and allow about one hour for the walking tour.

Tavuni Hill Fort

Built in the 18th century by Tongan chief Maile Latumai, this defensive **fort** (adult/child/family F\$12/3/30; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1.30pm Sat) was used in times of tribal war. It's the most accessible fort of its kind in Fiji and provides an excellent insight into the strong precolonial links between Tonga and Fiji. The steep limestone ridge, about 90m high at the edge of a bend in the Sigatoka River, was an obvious strategic location and the views are magnificent.

The site has been restored as a means of income for villagers, and has an information centre, a number of grave sites, a *rara* (ceremonial grounds) and a *vatu ni bokola* (head-chopping stone). Regular

local buses pass Tavuni Hill (60c, seven a day on weekdays), about 4km north, from where taxis are about F\$5 one way.

ACTIVITIES

Surfing

Sigatoka has Fiji's only beach break, over a large, submerged rock platform covered in sand. Surfing is possible at the point break at the mouth of the Sigatoka River.

SLEEPING & EATING

Unless you're stuck, you're better off heading to the superior accommodation in nearby Korotogo. Self-caterers can stock up at the Morris Hedstrom supermarket.

River View Restaurant (☎ 650 1530/1520; jrms traveltours@connect.com.fj; Queens Rd; dm F\$20, r F\$45-65; ☎ ☑) This elevated restaurant has clean, white and bright rooms attached. All except the dorms include a private bathroom and fridge. The restaurant (mains F\$16 to F\$30) has lovely river views and serves great seafood in a cavernous dancehall-like interior.

Vilisite's Seafood Restaurant (☎ 650 1030; Queens Rd; mains F\$8-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Tuck into fabulous seafood in kitschy tropicana surrounds at this popular Fijian eatery. The extensive menu includes curries and Chinese dishes but you'd be nuts to bypass the shellfish. Takeaway is also available.

Also recommended:

Le Café (☎ 652 0668/877; 28 Queens Rd; meals F\$10-15; ☎ breakfast & lunch; ☑) Sigatoka's nicest spot for brekkie.

Sigatoka Club (☎ 650 0026; Queens Rd; mains F\$8-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Downstairs from the River View Restaurant, Sigatoka's best drinking hole with decent pub nosh.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Pacific Transport and Sunbeam Transport run several express buses a day to and from Nadi (F\$4, 1½ hours) and Suva (F\$8, 2¾ hours). Add about an hour for nonexpress buses.

Korotogo & Korolevu

The Coral Coast begins its dazzling thread in earnest at the small village of Korotogo, where travellers will find a surrounding scatter of accommodation.

The most scenic stretch of the coast sits between Korotogo and Korolevu, where

the road wraps itself around clear blue bays, beaches, coral reefs and mountains. Resorts to suit all budgets occupy private coves around the village of Korolevu and the hilly terrain offers panoramic photo opportunities. In most areas the beach is tidal and, except for some lagoons, is only suitable for swimming and snorkelling at high tide. Sovi Bay, 2.5km east of Korotogo, is OK for swimming, but be careful of the strong channel currents.

SIGHTS

Kula Eco Park

Supported by the National Trust for Fiji and several international parks and conservation bodies, this **wildlife sanctuary** (☎ 650 0505; www.fijiwild.com; adult/child F\$15/7.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) is a must for fans of the furred, feathered and scaled. Wooden walkways traverse streams, Fijian flora and a menagerie of hawksbill sea turtles (hand fed at 11am, 1pm and 3.30pm daily), musk parrots, collared parrots (the Kula bird), peregrine falcons, fruit bats and more. The park also runs invaluable breeding programmes, with success stories for the Pacific black duck (Fiji's only remaining duck species) and the crested and banded iguana.

TOURS

Adventures in Paradise (☎ 652 0833; www.adventuresinparadise.fiji.com; tours per person from Coral Coast/Nadi F\$100/120) offers day trips to the Naihehe cave (see p178) and tours to waterfalls near Korolevu. Tours include a village visit, kava ceremony, lunch and transport from Coral Coast and Nadi hotels.

Rivers Fiji (☎ 345 0147, 999 2349; www.riversfiji.com) offers great rafting trips up the Navua River with transfers from Coral Coast resorts.

SLEEPING

Budget

Beachhouse (☎ 0800 653 0530, 653 0500; www.fiji.beachhouse.com; Queens Rd; camping per person F\$16, dm F\$25-30, d F\$80; ☎) This expansive retreat has leafy green grounds, a pleasant beach and a heady social atmosphere. Dorms are in two-storey timber houses (triples are roomy and atmospheric) and doubles are in colourful duplex bungalows. The Coconut Café here serves rolls and smoothies for lunch and a set dinner. Activities include horse riding (F\$15 per hour) and a waterfall trek (F\$5).

Vakaviti (☎ 0800 650 0526, 650 0526; www.vakaviti.com; Queens Rd; dm F\$15-20, d F\$70-80; ☎) This small and personal resort tumbles down a steep, vegetated embankment overlooking the water. There are spotless dorms, bright and modern motel rooms which open onto a lovely pool and BBQ area, and generous *bure* tucked in amid the jungle, closer to the road.

Namatakula Village Homestay (www.fijibure.com/namatakula/index.htm; Namatakula; per adult/child incl meals F\$70/35) Readers recommend this homestay for an authentic taste of Fijian village life. Simon and Judith Batibasaga welcome travellers into their home for simple accommodation and generous meals. Guests have the opportunity to visit the school, attend a mass and immerse themselves in a traditional village.

Midrange

Tubakula Beach Bungalows (☎ 650 0097; www.fiji4less.com; Queens Rd; dm F\$17.50, s/tw without bathroom F\$40/45, st F\$80-120; ☎ ☑) Excellent A-frame chalets with strapping timber frames, modern kitchens and verandas give this lovely resort a touch of the mountains, but the palm trees, swimming pool and waterfront setting are undeniably Fiji. Dorms, singles and doubles are simple and neat.

Sandy Point Beach Cottages (☎ 650 0125; cbcm@connect.com.fj; Queens Rd; st from F\$90; ☎) Tucked off the road in a forested patch of the seaside, Sandy Point has five quaint and comfy self-contained cottages. The tropical setting is overshadowed somewhat by a proliferation of satellite dishes but these supply satellite TV. It's a peaceful setting and a favourite with in-the-know Suvanites.

Bedarra Inn (☎ 650 0476; www.bedarra.fiji.com; Queens Rd; r F\$110-155; ☎ ☑) This atmospheric hotel offers spiffy rooms with tiled floors, spotless interiors and plenty of natural light. Budget rooms are fan-cooled, two-bed and self-contained, and sleep up to four. The lofty deluxe rooms don't have kitchens but include balconies and air-con. There's also a restaurant (p164) and small lounge bar.

Tambua Sands Beach Resort (☎ 650 0399; www.tambuasandsfiji.com; Queens Rd; d F\$155-170; ☎) This friendly resort will suit intrepid travellers looking to indulge. *Bure* are beachside or oceanview; the latter are pricier but dressed up like chic holiday flats and better value. Manicured lawns are littered with

sun lounges and there's a good restaurant (mains F\$15 to F\$30).

Top End

Crusoe's Retreat (☎ 650 0185; www.crusoesretreat.com; Namuaquua Rd; d incl breakfast F\$240-280; 🍽️) In a sublime location, this small resort sits on a secluded beach behind a plummet of hills and encompasses 28 fan-cooled *bure* with polished Fijian interiors and a fabulous restaurant. A two-tank dive costs F\$210 and transfers from Nadi or Suva are F\$75 one way.

Naviti Resort (☎ 653 0444; www.navitiresort.com.fj; Queens Rd; r F\$320-340, st F\$570; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Heavy on the greenery and light on the concrete, the colossal Naviti is about as pretty as large-scale resorts go. Rooms are suitably stylish and packed with five-star amenities. The health spa, nine-hole golf course, kids' club, disabled access and excellent service distinguish it from the rest. The resort's Wasawasa Restaurant has meals from F\$35 and international-themed buffet nights.

More top-end options:

Outrigger on the Lagoon (☎ 650 0044; www.outrigger.com/fiji; Queens Rd; r from F\$590; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Stylish rooms and *bure*, superb views and excellent facilities in a five-star, four-storey shell.

Wellesley Resort (☎ 650 0807; www.wellesleyresort.com.fj; Man Friday Rd; d incl meals from F\$280; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Romantic boutique resort with 15 suites and a stunning location.

EATING

Vilisite's Restaurant (☎ 653 0054; Queens Rd; mains F\$20-45; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dripping in tropical garb in front of sweeping ocean views, Vilisite's is the nicest restaurant in the area outside of the flashy resorts. Plentiful quantities of king prawns, lobster, octopus and seafood curries are dished up by friendly staff.

Bedarra Inn Restaurant (☎ 650 0476; www.bedarra.fiji.com; mains F\$15-30; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) It seems humble enough but the atmospheric restaurant at this hotel serves inventive steak, chicken and stir-fry dishes alongside perfectly cooked fresh seafood. You can down it all with good wine or a bitter inside the cool interior, or at poolside tables with great ocean views.

Ice Bar Restaurant (☎ 650 1513; Queens Rd; mains F\$10-20; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Delicious seafood and Indian curries are served in this open-air eatery with wooden bench tables

and seating. It's attached to a small supermarket and while the setting is utterly unsophisticated, the food is excellent.

Le Cafe (☎ 652 0877; mains F\$10-15; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serves European-style food and tasty pizzas. Happy hour takes place from 5pm to 7pm.

SHOPPING

East of Korolevu, **Baravi Handicrafts** (☎ 652 0364; 🕒 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun) sells local crafts, clothes and jewellery.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Korotogo area is about 8km east of Sigatoka, and Korolevu village is 31km east of Sigatoka. Buses ply the Queens Rd and will drop guests off outside resorts.

Pacific Harbour

Prepared, planned and pedicured to a tidy point, Pacific Harbour is an upmarket housing development that emerges from the Coral Coast's dense vegetation like a flat, green Sahara. The wide cul-de-sac streets, flawless lawns and ordered river are the most suburban setting in Fiji. It's a novelty but local residents love it. Most visitors head here for fabulous golf, world-class diving in nearby Beqa (*ben-ga*) Lagoon and the opportunity to visit the Namosi Highlands to the north. The beach at Deuba is reasonable for swimming.

SIGHTS

Take a sunset walk up to the hilltop for a lovely view of Beqa Lagoon. The **Arts Village** (☎ 345 0065; www.artsfactory.com; tours per adult/child from F\$35/18; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) is an incongruous display of Fijian culture in a theme-show package. Fijian actors dressed in traditional costumes carry out mock battles, and there are firewalking and *meke* shows (adult/child F\$45/25) every Thursday at 11am. It's geared squarely at tour buses and families, all of whom enjoy it thoroughly.

Attached to the Arts Village, the **Market-place** is a congregation of eateries and souvenir shops and a pleasant spot to kill an hour or so.

ACTIVITIES

Golf

The **Greens South Pacific** (☎ 345 0022; 9/18 holes F\$20/40) is a beautiful golf course littered

with challenging bunkers and canals. Club rental is F\$15/20 per nine/18 holes.

Diving

Beqa Lagoon is a world-renowned dive site just offshore from Pacific Harbour. **Aqua-Trek** (☎ 325 0324; www.aquatrek.com) at the Pearl South Pacific (below) has an excellent reputation and offers two-tank dives/open water courses for F\$170/700, as well as shark-feeding dives (F\$200 for two dives) which get rave reviews from readers.

Pacific Safari Club (below) also has a small diving outfit and charges F\$95 for a two-tank dive.

TOURS

Rivers Fiji (☎ 345 0147, 999 2349; www.riversfiji.com; day tours per person from F\$190) Based at Pacific Harbour, Rivers Fiji offers excellent kayaking and rafting trips to the Namosi Highlands (p178). The Upper Navua River tour (F\$260 per person) takes in scenic gorges and advanced rapids.

Wilderness Ethnic Adventure Fiji (☎ 331 5730; www.wildernessfiji.com.fj) Offers tours to the Navua River, picking up passengers from Pacific Harbour as well as from Suva hotels (see p170).

Discover Fiji Tours (☎ 345 0180; www.discoverfiji.com) This outfit has several day tours (from F\$135 per person) to the Navua River area, which include waterfall visits, 4WD trips and kayaking.

SLEEPING

Pearl South Pacific (☎ 345 0022; www.thepearlsouthpacific.com; Queens Rd; d F\$300-360, st F\$640; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Revamped and renovated into one of the country's finest hotels, the Pearl has sassy Fijian-Asian fusion rooms with private decked alcoves and cushioned sun lounges. The resort itself is littered with sueded box couches, oriental-style booths, vast open terraces, grassed sunbaking settings, restaurants and bars.

Pacific Safari Club (☎ 345 0498; www.pacificsafari.com; River Dr; dm/d/f F\$20/55/65; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Planted next to a breezy bank of the canal, this compact resort has a single-storey block of excellent self-contained flats with tidy, floral interiors and spotless kitchens. Some also have TVs.

Club Coral Coast (☎ 345 0421; clubcoralcoast@connect.com.fj; Lot 12 Belo Circle; r F\$90, f F\$120; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹)

Occupying its own bend in the river, this petite resort has a series of split-level rooms with wicker furniture, sunny décor, kitchenettes and patios. Rooms with shared facilities are cosy and neat.

Also recommended:

Deuba Inn (☎ 345 0544; theislander@connect.com.fj; Queens Rd; s/d without bathroom F\$20/35, r F\$55-65) Dirt-cheap portable-style rooms and two weary units.

Lagoon Resort (☎ 345 0100; www.lagoonresort.com; Fairway Place; d F\$160-260, st F\$300; 🍽️ 🍷 🍹) Grand, colonial-style estate with dignified rooms, restaurant and service.

EATING

Kai Yanuanu Restaurant (Queens Rd; mains F\$14-30; 🍽️ breakfast & dinner) Hiding behind the budget inn façade of the Deuba Inn (above) and dressed up like a retro beach house, this restaurant is Pacific Harbour's dark horse. It serves outstanding seafood alongside curries, chicken and steaks, plus fruit crushes thick enough to make your straw stand straight.

Lagoon Resort Restaurant (☎ 345 0100; Fairway Place; lunch mains F\$8-15, dinner mains F\$20-30; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) The regal restaurant at the Lagoon Resort (above) serves hearty sandwiches and curries for lunch and fancy dinner mains, such as char-grilled *mahimahi* or beef tornadoes. Seating is at high-backed chairs and the floor-to-ceiling windows provide ample vistas of green lawns.

Oasis Restaurant (☎ 345 0617; Arts Village Marketplace; mains F\$10-30; 🍽️ lunch & dinner; 🍷) Darkened wood tables and seating adorn the cool interior of this atmospheric restaurant and a wall of secondhand books alleviates the waiting game. The eclectic menu includes burgers, sandwiches, tortillas, curries and a whole lotta seafood.

More recommendations:

Pastry Bure (☎ 345 0126; Arts Village Marketplace; meals F\$4-10; 🍽️ breakfast & lunch; 🍷) Delectable coffee, breakfasts and baked goodies.

Mantarae Restaurant (☎ 345 0022; Queens Rd; mains F\$25-35; 🍽️ dinner) Sophisticated cuisine and wine list at the Pearl South Pacific (left).

Self-caterers can stock up at the **Pic N Pac Supermarket** (Arts Village Marketplace).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pacific Harbour is about an hour's express bus ride from Suva (F\$3.20) and around

three hours from Nadi (F\$8). A taxi to Suva costs F\$35; call **Ratan's Taxi** (☎ 346 0329).

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

Offshore from Pacific Harbour, a 64km-long barrier reef encloses the exquisite **Beqa Lagoon**, world-famous for its dizzying dive sites, including Side Streets and Caesar's Rocks. Divers are joined by avid surfers who test their mettle on the powerful left-hand breaks at Frigate's Passage, also known as Kavu Kavu Reef. Anchored amid the lagoon are Beqa and Yanuca Islands; untouched bar a handful of inconspicuous resorts.

Beqa

area 36 sq km

Volcanic and rugged, Beqa is known for its onshore villages that practise traditional firewalking, and for its fantastic offshore dive sites.

The cosy **Lawaki Beach House** (☎ 992 1621; www.lawakibeachhouse.com; camping F\$50, dm/s/d F\$65/95/160) sits in front of an isolated beach. Accommodation is in two double *bure* with en suites and verandas, or a six-bed dorm. There's also a communal TV lounge and good snorkelling just offshore. Rates include three meals and children under 12 pay 15% less. The hospitality here is legendary. Transfers from Navua cost F\$130 per person one way.

The façade of the **Beqa Lagoon Resort** (☎ 330 4042; www.beqalagoonresort.com; 4/5/7 nights per person from F\$1710/2050/2340; 🍷 🍷) looks exclusive but this opulent resort caters to families in purpose-built two-bedroom *bure*, as well as couples in romantic doubles. There's a lovely palm-fringed beach, and the surrounding landscape and sea lends itself to snorkelling, diving and hiking. Rates include transfers from Nadi and delectable meals. Child rates are heavily discounted.

Yanuca

Compact and beautiful Yanuca is a mass of green hills, interrupted by a village and a couple of surf camps. The beaches here are lovely and it's a short boat haul to the surf breaks of Frigate's Passage.

Many a traveller hits the chic surf camp of **Batiliuva** (☎ 345 1019, 992 0019; www.batiliuva.com; dm/d incl meals F\$150/300) for a week and wakes up in a hammock a month later. The superb hospitality, laid-back vibes and

excellent food lull guests into an idyllic state, trumped only by superlative surfing. Sturdy dorms and doubles are airy and basic and transfers from Pacific Harbour are F\$50 return per person.

Etched into a grassy grove of the island, the simple **Yanuca Island Resort** (☎ 336 1281, 997 8958; www.frigatesreef.com; dm/s/d F\$40/70/120) is staffed by friendly locals (it's a source of income for the neighbouring village) and offers serious surfers and urban escapees peace and quiet. There is one dorm with solid timber bunks and mosquito nets, plus two cabins with private bathrooms. Meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner F\$10/15/15) are plentiful and tasty and return boat transfers to Pacific Harbour/Frigate's Passage are F\$50/80 per person.

SUVA

pop 358,495

The Fijian capital is a sultry spread occupying a small peninsula jutting into the South Pacific Ocean. A cosmopolitan milieu of cultures and influences inhabits the warped downtown grid, where grand colonial buildings sidle up to modern high-rises and shopping plazas. Curry houses, sari shops and bric-a-brac traders huddle in small wynds plucked straight from a city in India. A breezy esplanade with fabulous views of Suva Harbour and Joske's Thumb marks the city's western border, and the density of the central business district dissipates in all other directions as residential pockets climb the hills of the outer suburbs. Clouds tend to hover over Suva and frequently dump rain on the city (around 300mm each year), but this can be a cool and welcome relief.

Around half of Suva's inhabitants are crowded into settlements on land that has no title, and crime and poverty are factors to be aware of (see p147). Suvans are incredibly friendly though, and the shops, sights, dining and ambience here can easily fill a two- or three-day itinerary.

Sights

FIJI MUSEUM

This excellent **museum** (☎ 331 5944; www.fiji.museum.org.fj; Ratu Cakobau Rd; adult/child F\$7/5; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) delves into Fiji's archaeological, political, cultural and linguistic evolution with original musical

instruments, pottery, jewellery and a magnificent double-hulled canoe. There's also a daunting array of Fijian war clubs and cannibal utensils.

The souvenir shop on the ground floor sells a diversity of books on Fijian culture and the small Indo-Fijian Gallery upstairs features works by the country's finest contemporary artists.

THURSTON GARDENS

After visiting the museum, take a wander through these compact but beautiful gardens. The lack of fussy landscaping adds to the tropical element, with clusters of native flora scattered haphazardly throughout the lawns. Much of the vivid vegetation is labelled for the benefit of curious horticulturalists. Walking trails traverse the gardens and bench seating provides sensory-fatigue relief. It's a lovely spot for a picnic, particularly if you camp yourself under one of the grand and stately fig trees.

COLO-I-SUVA FOREST PARK

Eleven kilometres from downtown Suva, and at an altitude that reaches 600ft, this rainforest **park** (☎ 332 0211; adult/child F\$5/1; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Sun) is a cool and peaceful haven from the urban hubbub. Colo-i-Suva (tholo-ee-soo-va) has 6.5km of walking trails which navigate clear natural pools and gorgeous vistas, with just a touch of Indiana Jones in the rope swings over water. Fourteen bird species fill the park, including the scarlet robin, spotted fantail, Fiji goshawk and sulphur-breasted musk parrots.

The visitor information centre is on the left side of the road as you approach from Suva. Before entering, ask the guards about the security situation within the park. You can pay an additional fee (on asking) to have a guard accompany you and if you're travelling alone this is definitely recommended.

To get here, take the Saweni bus from Suva bus station (F\$1, 20 minutes, half-hourly).

OTHER SIGHTS

The foreboding and handsome **government buildings** (1939 and 1967), at the end of Carnarvon St, are set on heavy foundations atop reclaimed land. Opened in 1992, the **parliament buildings** (☎ 330 5811; www.parliament.gov.fj;

Battery Rd; admission free) are far more aesthetic and adorned with traditional Fijian *tapa* clothes and works of art. It's advisable to call ahead if you want to tour the grounds, but you can also obtain a visitor's pass from the guard at the main entrance.

Set in a breadth of breezy gardens, the University of the South Pacific's main **Laucala Campus** (☎ 331 3900; fax 330 1305) is a pleasant spot for a stroll and bout of people-watching. Students from islands throughout the Pacific attend the university and the cultural diversity is a curio in itself. Inside the northwestern entrance, on the right, is a small **botanical garden** with trails winding around Pacific trees and plants. You can also visit the **Oceania Centre for Arts & Culture**, where temporary exhibits and dance performances are held. It's often possible to catch a free rehearsal on weekday mornings.

Activities

The **National Aquatic Centre** (☎ 331 8185; Laucala Bay Rd, Laucala Bay; admission F\$3; 🕒 6am-8pm Mon-Sat & 9am-6pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul-Sep) was built for the 2003 South Pacific Games and includes a 50m and 25m pool.

The sizeable outdoor **Suva Olympic Swimming Pool** (224 Victoria Pde; adult/child F\$1.65/80c; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri & 8am-6pm Sat Apr-Sep, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri & 7am-7pm Sat Oct-Mar) is a family magnet and an oasis on a hot day. There is a kiddies play area, lap lanes and changing cubicles.

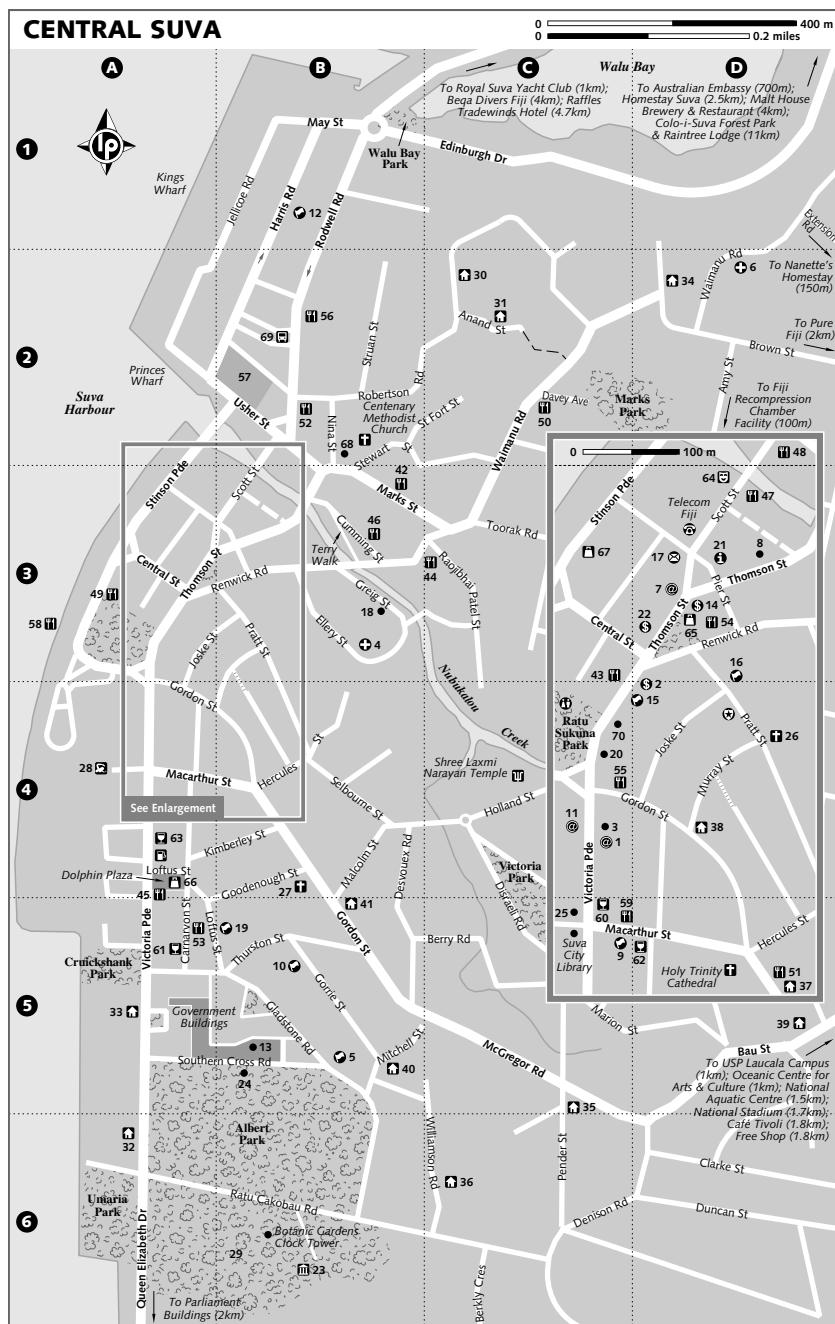
Beqa Divers Fiji (☎ 336 1088; www.bequadivers.com; 75 Marine Dr, Lami) offers two-tank dives (F\$145) and PADI open water courses (F\$550) in Beqa Lagoon.

Visiting yachties can get membership at the **Royal Suva Yacht Club** (☎ 331 2921; rsyc@connect.com.fj; 🕒 office 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat). Mooring fees for a small yacht start at F\$40 per day.

Suva Walking Tour

Downtown Suva has a scattering of colonial buildings and places of interest, making it a pleasant place to wander around. Give yourself several hours for this tour.

Start your journey with that most Suvan of destinations – the **municipal market** (1). Ogle as traders ply their kava, vegetables and fruit, and take a snapshot of locals in motion. Make your way down Rodwell Rd, turn left onto Usher St, right onto Thomson and then immerse yourself in **Cumming St**



INFORMATION			
Alpha Computer.....	1	C4	
ANZ Bank.....	2	D4	
Bookmasters.....	3	C4	
Boulevard Central Pharmacy.....	(see 4)		
Boulevard Medical Centre.....	4	B3	
British High Commission.....	5	B5	
Colonial War Memorial Hospital.....	6	D2	
Connect Internet Café.....	7	D3	
Dominion House Arcade.....	8	D3	
Embassy of Nauru.....	9	C5	
Embassy of Tuvalu.....	10	B5	
Fintel.....	11	C4	
French Embassy.....	(see 8)		
German Consulate.....	12	B1	
Hunts Travel.....	(see 8)		
Japanese Embassy.....	(see 8)		
Korean Embassy.....	(see 20)		
Map Shop.....	13	B5	
Money Exchange.....	14	D3	
Netherlands Consulate.....	15	D4	
New Zealand Embassy.....	16	D3	
Post Office.....	17	D3	
Republic of Cappuccino.....	(see 54)		
South Pacific Tourism Organisation.....	(see 66)		
Suva Bookstore.....	18	B3	
US Embassy.....	19	B5	
Vanua Arcade.....	20	C4	
Visitor Information Centre.....	21	D3	
Westpac Bank.....	22	D3	
Roman Catholic Cathedral.....	26	D4	
St Andrew's Church.....	27	B4	
Suva Olympic Pool.....	28	A4	
Thurston Gardens.....	29	B6	
SLEEPING			
Capricorn Apartment Hotel.....	30	C2	
Colonial Lodge.....	31	C2	
Grand Pacific Hotel.....	32	A6	
Holiday Inn.....	33	A5	
Motel 6.....	34	D2	
Peninsula International Hotel.....	35	C5	
South Seas Private Hotel.....	36	C6	
Southern Cross Hotel.....	37	D5	
Sunset Apartment Motel.....	38	D4	
Suva Apartments.....	39	D5	
Suva Motor Inn.....	40	B5	
Tanua Plaza Hotel.....	41	B5	
EATING			
Ashiyana.....	(see 25)		
Cakes 2000.....	42	B3	
Capital Palace.....	43	C3	
Curry House.....	44	C3	
Daikoku.....	45	A4	
Dolphin Plaza Food Court.....	(see 66)		
Downtown Boulevard Shopping Centre.....	(see 4)		
Focaccia Café.....	(see 20)		
Govinda's Vegetarian Restaurant.....	46	B3	
Harbour Centre.....	47	D3	
Hot Bread Kitchen.....	48	D2	
JJ's on the Park.....	49	A3	
Korea House.....	50	C2	
L'Opera.....	51	D5	
Morris Hedstrom Supermarket.....	52	B2	
Old Mill Cottage.....	53	A5	
Republic of Cappuccino.....	54	D3	
Republic of Cappuccino.....	(see 66)		
Singh's Curry House.....	55	C4	
Supermarket.....	56	B2	
Suva Municipal Market.....	57	B2	
Tiko's Floating Restaurant.....	58	A3	
Victoria Wines & Spirits.....	59	C5	
DRINKING			
Bad Dog Café.....	60	C5	
Barn.....	61	A5	
Birdland R&B Club.....	62	D5	
O'Reilly's.....	(see 59)		
Traps Bar.....	63	A4	
ENTERTAINMENT			
Village 6 Cinema Complex.....	64	D3	
SHOPPING			
Bob's Hook Line & Sinkers.....	(see 47)		
Government Crafts Centre.....	(see 9)		
Jack's Handicrafts.....	65	D3	
ROC Market.....	66	A4	
Suva Curio & Handicraft Centre.....	67	C3	
TRANSPORT			
Air Fiji.....	(see 59)		
Beachcomber Cruises.....	68	B2	
Bus Station.....	69	B2	
Consort Shipping.....	(see 8)		
Patterson Brothers Shipping.....	(see 68)		
Sun Air.....	70	C4	
Taxi Stand.....	(see 69)		

(2). Suck in the scent of incense and curry and marvel at the stunning saris displayed in the shop windows. Turning right onto Renwick Rd, cross the river and drop into the **Republic of Cappuccino** (3; p173) for a coffee, or perhaps a recovery juice if the bitters got the better of you last night.

At the end of Renwick Rd, cross the road and make a beeline for the water by going down Central St. Take a breather on Stinson Pde and snap up the dramatic views of **Suva Harbour** and **Joske's Thumb** (4). Drop into the **Suva Curio & Handicraft Centre** (5; p174) and potter through the stalls of handmade arts and crafts. Turn left and follow the esplanade till you reach **Ratu Sukuna Park** (6). Amble through this tree-littered plot to make your way back to Thomson St. Continue south down Victoria Pde, past the pale colonial 1926 **Fintel building** (7) and the 1904 **old town hall** (8). Now home to several restaurants, the old town hall building was once used for dances, bazaars and performances. The stately 1909 **Suva City Library** (9) is also here.

Continue down Victoria Pde and take a rest at **Umaria Park** (10), teeming with kids scrambling over monkey bars and offering extensive water views in the background. On your right-hand side are the stately **government buildings** (11). Presiding over the manicured green lawns are statues of Ratu Cakobau and Ratu Sukuna.

In the block south of the government buildings, you may catch a rugby union team in action in **Albert Park** (12). On the northern edge of the park is the **Kingsford Smith Pavilion** (13), named after the famous aviator who landed here. On the seaside, opposite the park, is the Glorious old **Grand Pacific Hotel** (14). Built in 1914 by the Union Steamship Company, its ship-style architecture is reminiscent of the luxury liners that once plied the seas. The hotel has been abandoned since 1992 but restoration plans are under way.

Once you've passed the Grand Pacific Hotel, cross the road, keeping Albert Park on your left. At the corner of Ratu Cakobau Rd and Queen Elizabeth Dve is the entrance

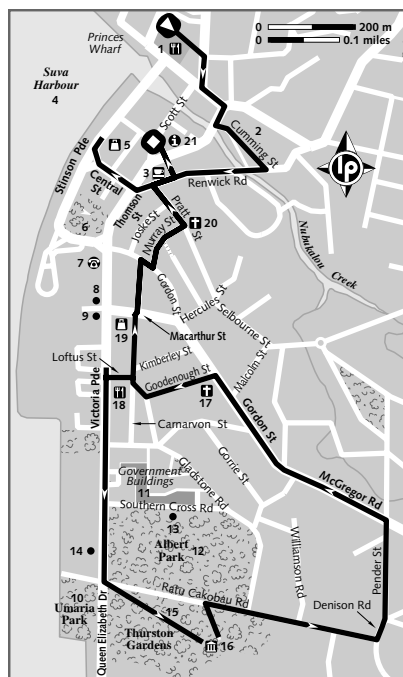
to **Thurston Gardens (15; p167)**. Meander through this balmy park and take a breather beneath one of the stately figs. Within the grounds is the **Fiji Museum (16; p166)**.

Continue east along Ratu Cakobau Rd and ascend into the inner suburbs. Turn left at Pender St and left again at McGregor Rd. Amid the tranquil residential streets you'll have sweeping views of the city below. Continue along McGregor Rd, which turns into Gordon St and leads back to the city centre. Turn left at Goodenough St, with **St Andrew's Church (17)** on the corner. Follow Goodenough St and dogleg your way back to Victoria Pde for a well-earned teppanyaki lunch at **Daikoku (18; p172)**.

Head back onto Carnarvon St to bypass the main drag. Stroll past the bars and clubs

WALK FACTS

Start Municipal Market
Finish Visitor Information Centre
Distance About 4km
Duration Three hours



of this little back road and duck into the **Government Crafts Centre (19; p174)**, a small outlet which sells some of the finest crafts in Fiji. Continue walking north along Carnarvon St, crossing Gordon St to Murray St. At the corner of Murray and Pratt Sts is the 1902 **Roman Catholic Cathedral (20)**, built of sandstone imported from Sydney and one of Suva's most prominent landmarks. Turn left onto Pratt St, right onto Renwick Rd and left onto Pier St to end your journey at the **visitor information centre (21; p147)**.

Tours

Wilderness Ethnic Adventure Fiji (☎ 359 3230; www.wildernessfiji.com.fj) Picks up from Suva hotels and offers rafting and canoeing tours on the Navua River (F\$115 per person), half- and full-day tours to Nasilai village (F\$60/85 per person) and city tours of Suva (F\$70 per person).

Discover Fiji Tours (☎ 345 0180; www.discoverfiji.com) Also offers canoe trips 20km inland along the Navua River to a giant waterfall (from F\$135 per person).

Sleeping BUDGET

Suva Apartments (☎ 330 4280; fasanoc@fasanoc.org.fj; 17 Bau St; s/d/tr from F\$45/60/75; ☎ ☎) Originally built to accommodate Fijian Olympians, this apartment block contains 20 modern and spotless units with fully equipped kitchens. It's an excellent option for long stays, although the abundance of concrete and steel creates a slightly clinical ambience. It fills up quickly, so bookings are advised.

South Seas Private Hotel (☎ 331 2296; www.fiji4less.com; 6 Williamson Rd; dm/s/d/f F\$14/25/35/40; ☎) This glorious old hotel, with its ocean-liner interior and sweeping veranda, is one of Suva's most atmospheric buildings. Neat and spacious dorms have large steel bunks and all but one room has shared facilities. It doesn't see much human traffic, which may be a plus or minus depending on your preference.

More budget options:

Colonial Lodge (☎ 330 0655; coloniallodge@connect.com.fj; 19 Anand St; dm/s F\$30/65, d F\$90) Boisterous homestay with cheerful rooms. Breakfast included.

Sunset Apartment Motel (☎ 330 1799; fax 330 3446; cnr Gordon & Murray Sts; dm/s/d from F\$12/45/55; ☎) Central option with dated but accommodating apartments.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Raintree Lodge (☎ 332 0562; www.raintreelodge@connect.com.fj; Princes Rd, Colo-i-Suva; camping per person F\$12.50, dm F\$18-20, d F\$60-110; ☎ ☎ ☎) Dulcet bird warbles in the morning, lush patches of rainforest, sun-dappled hammocks...this tranquil lodge feels a galaxy away from downtown Suva. Fortunately, it's only 12km and F\$1 on the bus. Tucked into a private pocket of tropical forest, Raintree Lodge offers tidy bunk dorms in timber cottages, and a two-storey cabin containing cosy doubles with ceiling fans, plump beds and a chunk of balcony with water views. There are also intimate *bure* with secluded balconies and lake views. Glossy lakes, prolific birdlife and wide patches of lawn mingle with the buildings, and there's an excellent restaurant (p173) overlooking the water. Catch the Saweni bus from Suva's bus terminal.

MIDRANGE

Nanette's Homestay (☎ 331 6316; www.nanettes.com.fj; 56 Extension St; d/st from F\$90/135; ☎ ☎) Tucked into a quiet residential area, this B&B has appealing bathrooms, some with deliciously large bathtubs. There's also a communal TV lounge and kitchen. Downstairs are three schmick apartments with modern kitchens. The staff are so friendly you'll want to take them home with you.

Suva Motor Inn (☎ 331 3973; www.hexagonfiji.com; cnr Mitchell & Gorrie Sts; d 110-175; ☎) Fab for families, the Suva Motor Inn has smart and fresh studio and two-bedroom apartments containing sunny furnishings, modern kitchens and oodles of space. All rooms have balconies (ask for one with Albert Park views) and the water slide attached to the central pool is a kid-magnet.

Holiday Inn (☎ 330 1600; reservations@holidayinn.com.fj; Victoria Pde; d from F\$120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Right on the harbour shore, opposite the government buildings and museum, the Holiday Inn has spacious, cool and comfortable rooms. It appeals largely to business travellers and coach tours and has the facilities to match. On the downside, the staff can be slightly apathetic and the atmosphere is generic.

Motel 6 (☎ 330 7477; fax 330 7133; 1 Walu St; d/f F\$70/95) Perched at the end of a cul-de-sac off Waimanu Rd, with boggling harbour views, this complex has well-maintained motel rooms with TVs and fridges and one-bedroom family rooms with small kitchenettes. It's spotless, friendly and very secure, and the out-of-the-way location makes for a contented night's sleep.

Capricorn Apartment Hotel (☎ 330 3732; www.capricorn-hotels-fiji.com; 7 Fort St; r F\$100-130; ☎ ☎) This secure and friendly block of apartments sits high on Toorak Hill and buzzes

with a happy, personable air. Mix and match décor fills the self-contained units and the well-equipped kitchens contain microwaves. Some of the balconies have dazzling city and harbour views.

Also recommended:

Peninsula International Hotel (☎ 331 3711; www.peninsula.com.fj; cnr McGregor & Pender Sts; s/d F\$75/90; ☎ ☎ ☎) Large hotel with snug rooms in a leafy residential area.

Southern Cross Hotel (☎ 331 4233; southerncross@connect.com.fj; 63 Gordon St; r F\$100-135; ☎ ☎) Smart rooms, popular with business travellers.

TOP END

Homestay Suva (☎ 337 0395; homestaysuva@connect.com.fj; 265 Princes Rd, Tamavua; d incl breakfast F\$165-195; ☎ ☎) Unmatched class and service and a pool deck straight out of a *Vogue* shoot make this Suva's finest location to rest the head. Stylish doubles reside in the colonial house and there are also capacious studio rooms with balconies, TVs and kitchenettes. You'll need to book in advance. No children.

Tanoa Plaza Hotel (☎ 331 2300; www.tanoahotels.com; cnr Gordon & Malcolm Sts; d F\$185-200, st F\$410; ☎ ☎ ☎) This sleek and sophisticated hotel caters to comfort-needy creatures with large beds, chic interiors, fully equipped minibars and pamper products in the bathrooms. It's the most stylish of Suva's hotels and views from the 5th floor and up are simply dazzling.

Raffles Tradewinds Hotel (☎ 336 2450; www.traffes.com; Queens Rd, Lami; d/st from F\$130/280; ☎ ☎ ☎) Suva's onetime starlet has lost some of its sheen, but the waterfront location and well-maintained rooms are still snazzy enough to lure discerning guests. Rooms are sizeable and come with top-end trimmings, but they have a touch of the flashy airport lobby about them.

The Holiday Inn and Suva Motor Inn (see the midrange options) also have classy rooms in the top-end category. A joint venture has promised to transform the abandoned Grand Pacific Hotel opposite Albert Park into Suva's premier hotel.

Eating INDO-FIJIAN

Suva has an excellent spread of hole-in-the-wall curry houses, where those on tight budgets can eat like kings.

Ashiyana (☎ 331 3000; Old Town Hall Bldg, Victoria Pde; mains F\$10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Sun) For an Indian feast in refined surrounds, Ashiyana is a step up in atmosphere and style from the curry houses and serves good thali and tandoori dishes. The spicy curries here are legendary – even the taxi drivers consider them hot.

Singh's Curry House (☎ 359 1019; Gordon St; meals F\$4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) A delectable array of mostly South Indian curries flaunt themselves from the front counter at this cool and dark curry house. Vegetarians get plenty of choice and you can dine at high-backed booths or opt for a takeaway. It's one of the few places open on a Sunday.

Curry House (☎ 331 3756; meals F\$4-10; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2.30pm Sat) This bright and busy curry house serves excellent lamb, chicken, fish and vegetarian curries in a canteen-style setting. The fresh pakoras, samosas and other snacks are a good option if you're on the run. Get in early to avoid a table wait.

Govinda's Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 330 9587; 93 Cumming St; meals F\$5-7.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Sari-clad families fill the tables at this vegetarian restaurant, which is a good indication of its authenticity. The array of thalis is impressive but you should definitely leave room for the delicious Indian sweets on display.

JAPANESE, CHINESE & KOREAN

Daikoku (☎ 330 8968; Victoria Pde; mains F\$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Start the night with a round of sushi, sashimi and Asahi beers to whet the palate before moving onto Daikoku's speciality: seafood, chicken and beef teppanyaki. The food melts on the tongue and half the fun is watching the skilled chefs sear your fare in spectacular fashion on central hot plates. Bookings highly recommended.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Café Tivoli (☎ 338 5407; Garden City, Grantham Rd, Raiwai; meals F\$6-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch) The menu at Suva's café of the moment is a positively cosmopolitan affair and fussy Westerners craving gourmet delights will go giddy at the sight of the deli-dishes. You may like to start the day with a croissant stuffed with salsa and cheese, eggs any style you like or perhaps a mammoth BLT bagel. Early sweet tooths can tuck into pancake stacks, pastries or sugary slices and baked treats. For lunch there are dense quiches and inventive salads. The food isn't the only stylish feature and you get to consume the culinary pleasures at tables scattered beneath a breezy outdoor pagoda.

Capital Palace (☎ 331 6088; 64 Victoria Pde; mains F\$10; ☎ lunch & dinner) It seems half of Suva converges here for the excellent Sunday yum cha, but the regular menu also cites authentic delights, including shark fin soup and fried squid with chilli and salt, plus infusions like sesame chicken with taro. Mouth-watering smells and a happy din surround diners.

Korea House (☎ 331 1711; 178 Waimanu Rd; mains F\$12-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) Guarded by a grand Korean mural, this restaurant serves pungent *kimchi* and sticky Korean BBQ alongside authentic squid, pork, tofu, prawn and chicken. The interior is plain and no-nonsense but the effort goes into the food. There's a F\$10 lunch special and daily dinner discounts.

CAFÉS

Cakes 2000 (☎ 330 8994; 113 Marks St; meals F\$5-7; ☎ 7.30am-4pm) If you're decadent you'll bypass the mains and go straight for the cheesecakes at this café-cum-bakery-cum-cake shop. If you're hungry you may begin with a hearty breakfast or divine sausage roll. And for the sensible? Tuck into overstuffed sandwiches or Fijian faves like *palusami* or roast lamb neck.

Focaccia Café (☎ 330 9117; Vanua Arcade, Victoria Pde; meals F\$5; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This bustling eatery serves fresh burgers, wraps, rolls, kebabs and focaccias at its counter-seating or tables in the arcade lobby (it sounds incongruous but it works). The

breakfasts are hot and filling and the staff supremely friendly.

Republic of Cappuccino Dolphin Arcade (☎ 330 0333; Dolphin Arcade, Victoria Pde; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun); Downtown (☎ 330 0828, Renwick Rd; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Serves good coffee, juices, smoothies and snacks in air-conditioned (and very Starbucks) surrounds.

QUICK EATS

For around F\$5 you can tuck into takeaway fare at the food courts at **Downtown Boulevard Shopping Centre** (Ellery St), the **Harbour Centre** (Scott St) and **Dolphin Plaza** (cnr Loftus St & Victoria Pde). All serve pizza, pasta, Chinese, curries and Fijian dishes.

RESTAURANTS

Old Mill Cottage (☎ 331 2134; 49 Carnarvon St; dishes F\$6-12; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Inquisitive gastronomes will love the authentic Fijian fare, including *palusami*, curried shellfish and seaweed or fish stewed in coconut milk, served at this humble Suva institution. Less adventurous diners can opt for Indian curries or traditional roasts. Devoted office workers park themselves at tables on the front veranda or large booths inside.

Malt House Brewery & Restaurant (☎ 337 1515; 88 Jerusalem Rd, Vatu; mains F\$15-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Delicious microbrews and food lure happy diners back to this popular spot for repeat performances. Wood-fired pizzas go down well with the ales and lagers, or you can tuck into inventive seafood and meat dishes. It's often filled with a boisterous din and worth the trek from downtown.

Raintree Lodge (☎ 332 0562; www.raintreelodge.com.connect.com.fj; Princes Rd, Colo-i-Suva; mains F\$12-23; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Suva's most tranquil restaurant sits on an open-air veranda above a peaceful lake at this lovely lodge

(see p171). Dappled sunlight filters through the surrounding rainforest and bird calls accompany your meal. Traditional Fijian fare, inventive vegetarian options and fragrant curries are served and the pancakes at breakfast are legendary.

L'Opera (☎ 331 8602; 59 Gordon St; mains F\$20-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat, brunch Sun) This luscious slice of Italy features ornate fabrics, decadent table settings and lovingly made gnocchi, ravioli and other pastas. Authentic tuna, veal and lobster dishes are also on offer and the antipasto and wine list are excellent. Pure romance.

JJ's on the Park (☎ 330 5005; Stinson Pde; mains F\$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Dishing up good Western-style food and terrific harbour views from the 180-degree glass frontage, JJ's is an atmospheric place to dine. Generous salads, burgers, steak and seafood dishes are served with an impressive wine list. The surrounds are glossy and polished and the service attentive.

More restaurants:

Raffles Floating Restaurant (☎ 336 2450; www.raftlestradewinds.com; Queens Rd, Lami; mains F\$15-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) Beautiful harbour views at the Raffles Tradewinds Hotel (p171).

Tiko's Floating Restaurant (☎ 331 3626; off Stinson Pde; mains F\$20-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Excellent surf-and-turf fare in elegant surrounds.

SELF-CATERING

Suva Municipal Market (Rodwell Rd; ☎ mornings Mon-Sat) The best place for fish, exotic fruit and vegetables, plus neon-coloured Indian sweets. It's also a great place to buy kava for village visits.

There are a couple of supermarkets downtown on Rodwell Rd. The **Hot Bread Kitchen** (☎ 331 3919; Scott St; ☎ 5.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) serves bakery goodies and **Victoria Wines & Spirits** (☎ 331 2884; Victoria Pde;

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Traps Bar (☎ 331 2922; Victoria Pde) The entrance to this subterranean saloon bar is fairly unassuming – a couple of bouncers outside a dim doorway. But the low-key façade is just a ruse and Traps is one of Suva's best drinking holes. Enter the convivial bunker and you'll find yourself in the open main room with a pool table, wide-screen TV (yes with sports) and high benches lining the walls. The main bar simmers with the happy din of trendy young patrons meeting other trendy young patrons, but the crowd is friendly and unpretentious. As the night progresses you may find yourself on the dance floor, or accompanying the acoustic musicians croon Bob Marley melodies.

☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) sells a good range of grog.

Drinking

Suva's drinking and dancing dens get happy and loaded on Friday and Saturday nights, when Victoria Pde swarms with clubbers and barhoppers. You'll need to don appropriate attire (no flip flops), watch out for pickpockets on the dance floor and always take a taxi after dark, even if you're in a group – walking home is downright stupid.

O'Reillys (☎ 331 2968; cnr Macarthur St & Victoria Pde) Things start low-key at O'Reillys – a few quiet beers and a game of pool. But this bar manages to brew a party most nights and by 11ish the dance floor is generally throbbing with locals, travellers, students and expats. There's no distinct age code and the atmosphere is fun and friendly.

Bad Dog Café (☎ 330 4662; cnr Macarthur St & Victoria Pde) Despite the name this is one of Suva's stylish bars, where heady cocktails, tasty bar snacks and imported beers are served to chilled beats. The atmosphere is dark and swanky, and you can grab a booth or prop yourself beneath the funky lighting at the bar.

You can also grab a sociable drink at the Malt House Brewery & Restaurant (p173) or JJ's on the Park (p173). The restaurant and bar at the **Royal Suva Yacht Club** (☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat) is a popular watering hole with great views of the harbour and mountains.

Entertainment

Check out the entertainment section of the *Fiji Times* for upcoming events, cinema listings and what's on at nightclubs.

Village 6 Cinema Complex (☎ 330 6006; Scott St; admission F\$6) Suva's flashy commercial cinema complex shows recently released Hollywood and Bollywood films.

Two bar-cum-clubs featuring live music to busy crowds are **Birdland R&B Club** (☎ 330 3833; 6 Camarvon St) and the country and western style **Barn** (☎ 330 7845; Camarvon St).

Fijians are fanatical about their rugby, and even if you aren't that keen on the game it's worth going to a match. The season lasts from April to September and teams touch it out at the **National Stadium** (Laulaca Bay Rd, Laucala). The atmosphere is huge. Ask at the visitor information centre (p147) if there will be a match during your stay.

Shopping

Free Shop (☎ 359 3201; 1st fl, Garden City, Grantham Rd, Raiwai) Supported by the UN Development Program, the Free (Fiji Retail Enterprise Engine) shop sells excellent jewellery, clothing and crafts by local artists.

Government Crafts Centre (☎ 331 5869; Macarthur St) Although it's more expensive than elsewhere, this craft shop sells high-quality work by local artisans so it's a better place to head for to find a unique piece. Moreover, it assists rural artisans in the process.

Suva Curio & Handicraft Centre (Stinson Pde) The endless stalls at this craft market offer some

fantastic buys, but be prepared to bargain if you want to get your money's worth. Don't expect genuine antiques, regardless of what the vendor tells you.

Pure Fiji (☎ 338 3611; 52 Karsanji St; ☎ 10am-12.45pm Sat) This spot is actually a classy day spa, but every Saturday morning you can purchase exquisite creams, soaps and scrubs made from coconut oil and other natural extracts at bargain prices.

More shopping:

Jack's Handicrafts (☎ 330 8893; cnr Renwick Rd & Pier St) Souvenirs at reasonable prices.

Bob's Hook, Line & Sink (☎ 330 1013; Harbour Centre, Thomson St) Has a range of snorkelling, diving and fishing gear.

ROC Market (Victoria Pde; see p173) Small, eclectic market on the third Sunday of every month at the Dolphin Arcade outlet of the Republic of Cappuccino.

Getting There & Away

Frequent local buses operate along Queens Rd and Kings Rd from Suva's main bus terminal. Small trucks or carriers will also take passengers along Queens Rd. If you happen to be travelling in a group, you'll find that you can often get a taxi for little more than the price of a bus.

Nausori International Airport is 23km northeast of central Suva. A taxi to town costs F\$20; see p150 for more details on the airport and how to reach it from Suva.

Getting Around

It is easy to get around central Suva on foot. Taxis are quite cheap for short trips and they actually use the meter. The busy local bus station is next to the market: ask bus drivers or locals about the ever-fluctuating timetables.

VITI LEVU'S KINGS ROAD

Less toured than the Coral Coast's highway, Viti Levu's Kings Rd courses through the island's interior, traversing farmland and remote highland villages. It lacks the coastal scenery of the Queens Rd but matches its beauty with highland ascents and kilometres of untouched landscapes. Meeting the northern coast at Viti Levu Bay, it then skirts the shoreline to its final destination at Lautoka, ribboning its way past rugged cliffs and an infinite ocean. It's a beautiful trip by bus or 4WD. The road is unsealed between Korovou and Dama and

some skill is required here, particularly in the wet. Another road follows the coast to Natovi Landing (about a 20-minute drive), from where there are bus and ferry services to Labasa on Vanua Levu (p215) and Levuka on Ovalau (p215).

Nausori

pop 22,000

On the eastern bank of the Rewa River, Nausori is a bustling service centre for the area's agricultural and industry workers. Its only draw for travellers is its airport – the country's second largest. A couple of banks and some inexpensive eateries are near the bus station but you'll be better off staying in Suva, 19km southwest.

The airport, about 3km southeast of Nausori, is a hub for Air Fiji and Sun Air domestic flights. The airport premises are small and low-key with an ANZ bank open for international flights only.

Vaileka, Rakiraki & Ellington Wharf

Heading northwest from Korovou is a stunning journey: the mountain road winds along Wainibuka River, past small villages and Viti Levu Bay and down to Rakiraki. Against the skyline, the imposing Nakauvadra Range is believed to be the home of the great snake-god Degei, creator of all the islands.

Inland from Rakiraki, about 2km off Kings Rd past the sugar mill, the township of **Vaileka** has a bus station, taxi stands, banks, a market, supermarket and a few cafés (one with Internet access).

The turn-off to **Ellington Wharf** is 5km east of Rakiraki; the wharf is a further 1.5km. A Patterson Brothers ferry travels to Nabuwalu in southwest Vanua Levu from here twice a week (see p215).

Heading out of Rakiraki towards Nadi, look out for **Udreudre's Tomb**, the resting place of Fiji's most notorious cannibal whose personal tally reached at least 872 corpses. It's about 100m west of the Vaileka turn-off, on the left.

ACTIVITIES

Ellington Wharf Adventure Water Sports (☎ 669 3333; www.safarilodge.com.fj) offers two-hour snorkelling trips around Nananu-i-Ra (from F\$25 per person) and windsurfing (from F\$70 per person per hour), plus

MOVING TO THE BEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUM

Dancers pay homage to the steady beat of the drums, seemingly oblivious to the spectators. The poorly lit room is crowded with both tourists and locals yelling 'Bula' to one another over the din. As a big, indigenous Fijian man – who should be playing the chief in this scene – approaches with a flower behind his ear and a pitcher of beer on his tray, you don't need any reminding that this is no *meke*. This is Saturday night in Suva, when the country's urban youth let down their hair and pole dance to pop music.

Fiji's urban youth face many of the same difficulties as young people around the globe: teenage parenthood, crime, drugs and skyrocketing unemployment (only one in eight school leavers finds a job). However, these youths also find themselves straddling two opposing worlds – the traditional, conservative society of the villages many have left behind, where life was filled with cultural protocols, and the liberal, individualistic lifestyle of the modern and increasingly Westernised city.

The rising club and café culture is bringing together youths from indigenous and Indo-Fijian backgrounds, in the midst of a city filled with ethnic strife. Many face the near impossibility of surviving unemployment. Although it's not the Fiji of postcards, Fiji's rising urban youth culture is an intrinsic aspect of the country and an unexpected eye-opener.

DINING ON THE DEAD

Fijians began feasting upon one another as far back as 2500 years ago. In traditional Fijian society dining on the enemy was considered the ultimate revenge, as a disrespectful death was a lasting insult to the enemy's family and the departed spirit. When missionaries brought cannibalism to a halt in the late 19th century, it had become a ritualised part of everyday life. Bodies were either consumed on the battlefield or brought back to the village spirit house, where they were butchered, baked and eaten on the local war god's behalf. In celebration of the event, men performed the *cibi* (death dance) and women the *dele* – a dance in which they sexually humiliated corpses. Captives were often forced to watch their own body parts being consumed or even to eat some themselves!

For cannibalistic feasts, men fed themselves with special long-pronged wooden forks. Considered sacred relics, these forks were kept in the spirit house away from women or children. Mementos were kept of the victims to prolong the victor's sense of vengeance. Necklaces, hairpins or earlobe ornaments were made from human bones and skulls were sometimes made into *tanoa* (kava drinking bowls). Flesh was smoked and preserved for snacks, and war clubs were inlaid with teeth. Viti Levu Highlanders placed the bones of victims in tree branches as trophies and rows of stones were used to tally the number of bodies eaten by the chief.

Early European visitors and settlers were understandably obsessed with cannibalism. Those who managed to keep their wits and limbs about them recorded gruesome, fascinating stories.

sailing, fishing, kitesurfing and diving. Especially interesting are the sea-kayaking safaris (F\$960/2200 three/seven days).

SLEEPING & EATING

Wananavu Beach Resort (☎ 669 4433; www.wananavu.com; d from F\$290-320, f F\$480; ☞ ☎) On Viti Levu's northernmost point, this lovely resort has beautiful views of Nananu-i-Ra and the mainland's mountainous coastline. Comfortable *bure* have balconies, and there are three self-contained villas by the water. Visitors are welcome at the restaurant (meals F\$10 to F\$35), which has gorgeous vistas and food. The beach is partially manmade but it's pleasant nonetheless.

Rakiraki Hotel (☎ 669 4101; www.tanoahotels.com; Kings Rd; s/d F\$65/100; ☞ ☎) Nestled into spacious grounds with colourful splashes of bougainvillea, this colonial lodge has comfortable hotel rooms with '70s décor in two-storey blocks. There are also cheaper, simple rooms (F\$40) in a separate annex. The pool is surrounded by lovely wooden decking and there's a half-size tennis court, and restaurant (meals F\$16 to F\$20).

Ellington Wharf (☎ 693 3333; dm/d F\$20/60) If you've made it to the wharf it's preferable to head to Nananu-i-Ra, but if you get stuck you can bunk down in a clean dorm or comfortable double here. The thatched structures are tiled, polished and modern within and one of the doubles is en suite.

Vaileka has a few cheap cafés near the bus station. The **Coconut Café** (meals F\$4-10; ☞ lunch & dinner) at Ellington Wharf serves delicious curries, fish, soups and snacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sunbeam has regular express buses along the Kings Rd from Suva and Nadi (see p215), which stop at Vaileka and the turn-off to Ellington Wharf. To avoid lugging groceries and gear 1.3km to the wharf, get off at Vaileka and catch a taxi (F\$8). Sharing a taxi from Nadi is about F\$90.

Nananu-i-Ra

area 3.5 sq km

Tiny Nananu-i-Ra is a hop and a skip from the mainland but vastly different in landscape and character. There are wide beaches, scalloped bays and soft, grassy hills offering views of the volcanic Nakauvadra mountain range across the water on the mainland. There are no roads and no village and most residents are of European descent so there's little contact with indigenous culture.

ACTIVITIES

An abundance of sealife makes for great **snorkelling** offshore; head to the island's northern side for sea snakes. The island's exposure to the trade winds makes it popular for **windsurfing**, especially from June to August when winds are generally 10 knots and above.

Ellington Wharf Adventure Water Sports (see p175) hires out equipment.

The surrounding reefs and especially Bligh Water to the north have some amazing dive sites, but the windy weather can make it tricky. **Ra Divers** (☎ 669 4511; www.radivers.com) charges F\$400 for a six-tank dive and F\$550 for an open water course.

SLEEPING & EATING

It's a good idea to book accommodation ahead as the island can get busy. There's no bank and some budget places do not accept credit cards. Power is by generator, so no lights or fans after 10pm.

Safari Lodge (☎ 669 3333; www.safarilodge.com; dm/d F\$25/80) Housed in a stylish two-storey house, this fresh new lodge has a six-bed dorm with private en suite, plus loft-style doubles. Plans for a restaurant, shop and private *bure* were afoot at the time of research. The excellent meals (F\$45 daily) include veggie curries, Thai soups and Fijian dishes. One of Fiji's finest beaches is at the front door.

McDonald's Nananu Beach Cottages (☎ 669 4633; dm/tw F\$20/75, r F\$95) McDonald's cute blue and yellow cottages are scattered throughout a nicely landscaped property right in front of the jetty. There's also a spotless and roomy dorm, restaurant (meals F\$10 to F\$20) and hammocks out the front with uninterrupted views of the mainland. Snorkel gear/kayaks are F\$6/8 per half-day.

Betham's Beach Cottages (☎ 669 4132; www.bethams.com.fj; dm/r F\$20/110) These self-contained cottages are like upmarket caravan cabins. Each is fully furnished, and the spacious eight-bed dorm has its own kitchen, bathroom and veranda. The open-air café (mains F\$16 to F\$26) serves good if pricey meals.

Also available:

Charlie's Place (☎ 669 4676; dm/d F\$20/80) Private cottages on the hill with good views.

Morrisons Cottage (☎ 669 4516; tipple@connect.com.fj; dm F\$25, d F\$100) Simple bungalows on spacious grassy grounds. Closed November to May.

Nananu Lodge (☎ 669 4290; www.nananuislandlodge.com; camping per person F\$15, dm F\$20, d F\$60, f F\$120) Well-established with good accommodation. Home to Feejee Experience (p216) when it hits the island.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nananu-i-Ra is a 15-minute boat ride from Ellington Wharf, and each resort runs its

own transfers (around F\$20 per person return). Arrange your pick-up in advance.

VITI LEVU HIGHLANDS Nadarivatu & Navai

The forestry settlement of Nadarivatu is a beautiful highland area with fresh mountain air. Hike up to Mt Lomalagi for great views (three hours return). The **Forestry Office** (☎ 668 9001) can arrange for camping, dorm accommodation or a homestay with a local family (bring provisions and give money and/or groceries to cover costs). Alternatively, seek permission from the manager at **Vatukoula's Emperor Gold Mining Company** (☎ 668 0630) to stay at the gold mine's spacious resthouse.

About 8km south of Nadarivatu, Navai is at the foot of Fiji's highest peak, **Tomanivi** (Adam and Eve's place; 1323m), also known as Mt Victoria. Allow at least five hours return to hike from the village. Guides can be hired for around F\$10. The last half of the climb is akin to rock climbing and can be extremely slippery.

The turn-off for Nadarivatu is about 3km east of Tavua – it's a steep, rough trip (30km, 1½ hours!) that should be only navigated in a 4WD. Local bus services from Tavua ceased operating due to poor road conditions. The road from Navai to Suva is barely passable and best avoided.

Koroyanitu National Heritage Park

For nature lovers, the Koroyanitu National Heritage Park is definitely worth a hike. The area has beautiful nature walks through native Dakua forests and grasslands, bird-watching, archaeological sites, waterfalls and swimming. Contact the **Abaca visitor centre** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 1234; admission F\$5) for more information. Abaca (pronounced am-barth-a) village is at the base of **Mt Koroyanitu** (Mt Evans).

ACTIVITIES

Hiking

From Nase Lodge (p178), a climb to the summit of Castle Rock (about four hours) will reward you with panoramic views of the Mamanucas and Yasawas. You can hire local guides to take you there or on half- or full-day hikes of the area.

Mount Batilamu Trek (☎ 664 5747, 927 3592; fax 664 5547) organises 2½-day tours up the Sabeto Valley, including village visits and

transfers from Nadi/Lautoka hotels for F\$360. Tours depart Tuesday and Thursday from mid-April to mid-November.

SLEEPING & EATING

Experience highland village culture with a **village stay** (per night incl meals F\$35), which can be arranged through the Abaca visitor centre.

Nase Lodge (camp sites per person F\$10, dm F\$25) This old colonial lodge, about 400m uphill from the village, has 12 bunk beds, cooking facilities, a cold-water shower and a toilet. Meals in the village cost around F\$5/7/15 for breakfast/lunch/dinner, but you should also take some supplies.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are no buses to Abaca but you can contact **George Prasad** (☎ 664 5431, 991 6956; george_prasad@hotmail.com), who operates transfers to the village (F\$25/50 one way/return). If driving, turn inland off Queens Rd at Tavakubu Rd, then right at Abaca Rd. It's a further 10km of gravel road up to Abaca (4WD only).

Nausori Highlands

The grassy slopes of the Nausori Highlands snake their way into the mountainous interior, leaving the coastline and panoramic views in their wake. This region is one of the best places to experience traditional Fijian culture in small villages and settlements scattered throughout the fantastic landscape. Sunday is a day of rest, so village visits may be disruptive and unappreciated.

SIGHTS

Navala
pop 800

On the banks of the Ba River, Navala is by far Fiji's most picturesque village. The houses here are all traditional *bure*, built with local materials. While it's a photographer's dream, you must ask permission to take pictures. The village welcomes visitors who present a *sevusevu* (a gift such as *yagona*) and donation of F\$15. If you arrive independently, ask the first person you meet to escort you to the chief.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bulou's Lodge & Backpacker Hostel (☎ 666 6644, after the beeps dial 2116; dm F\$45, *bure* per person F\$55) On the river's edge a kilometre south of Navala, this friendly place offers village trips,

swimming and *bilibili* (bamboo raft) trips. There is a traditional *bure* in the garden, or you can stay in the 10-bed dorm attached to the house; there are cold-water showers and flush toilets but no electricity. Meals include plenty of home-grown fruit and vegetables and local dishes. It's best to ring in advance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are local buses from Ba to Navala (F\$4, 1½ hours, twice daily) – catch the 12.15pm to avoid arriving at the village when it's dark. Ring Bulou's Lodge in advance and they will pick you up from Navala. Carriers cost about F\$60 for the vehicle.

If driving from Ba, there are a couple of turns to watch out for: at the police post turn left, passing a shop on your right, and at the next fork in the road keep left. The road is rough and rocky, but usually passable – seek local advice before heading out.

SIGATOKA VALLEY

The **Naihehe cave**, about an hour's drive upriver from Sigatoka, was once used as a fortress by hill tribes and has the remains of a ritual platform and cannibal oven. Adventures in Paradise (p163) offers guided tours departing Nadi and the Coral Coast.

NAMOSI HIGHLANDS

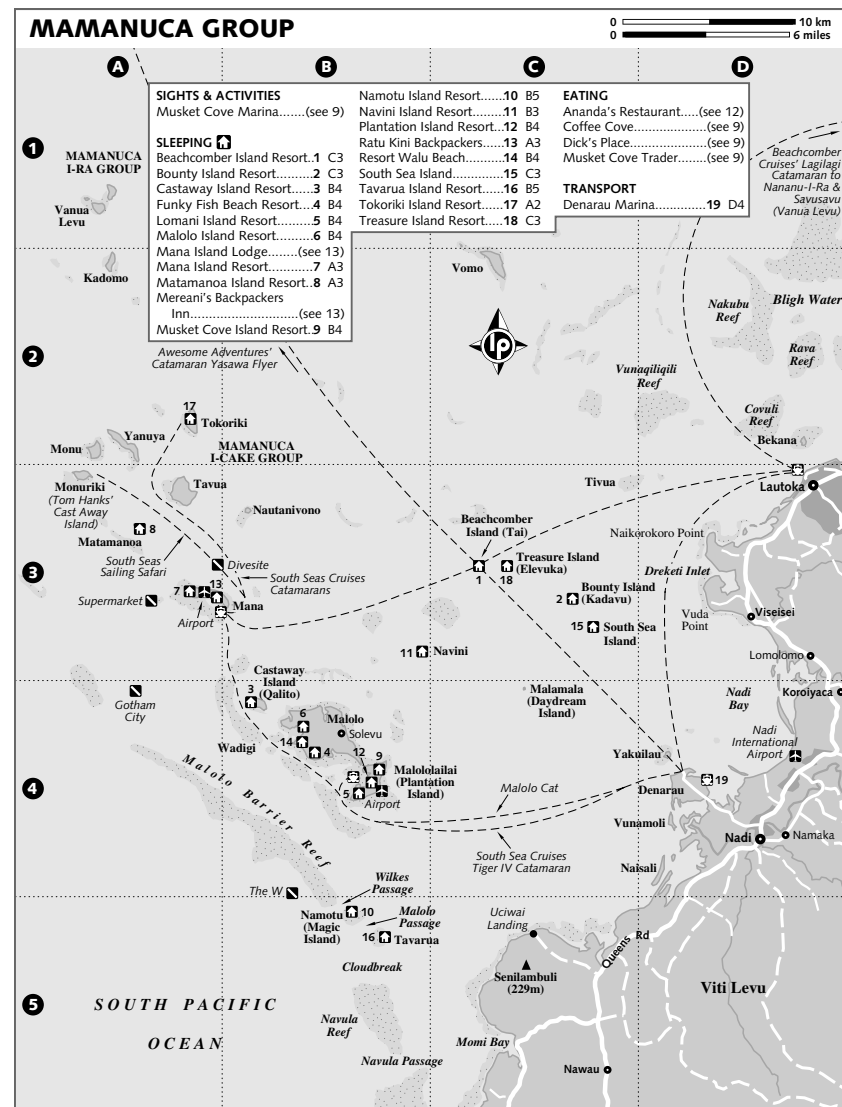
The steamy Namosi Highlands, north of Pacific Harbour, have Fiji's most spectacular scenery, complete with rainforests, steep ranges, deep river canyons and tall waterfalls. If you have your own wheels (preferably 4WD), take a detour inland from Nabukavesi.

Rivers Fiji (☎ 345 0147; www.riversfiji.com) offers well-organised river-rafting and kayaking trips to the Namosi Highlands, with great equipment, from F\$190 per person.

Discover Fiji Tours and Wilderness Ethnic Adventure Fiji also offer tours into the Navua River area (see p165).

MAMANUCA GROUP

White-sand beaches, crystalline seas, world-class snorkelling, diving and surfing – the Mamanucas are a magnet for travellers in urgent need of tropical therapy. Reliably sunny and basking in a lagoon formed



by the Malolo Barrier Reef and the mainland, these 20 islands promise a tangible replica of the brochure tease. Many take day-trippers from nearby Nadi and Lautoka, who gorge themselves on buffet food and recover on sunkissed beaches. For longer sojourns the spread of resorts caters to all budgets, so whether your taste

is champagne or Fiji Bitter you can enjoy their idyllic wares.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The following companies operate boat transfers from Denarau to the Mamanucas and inter-island transfers. Most include

courtesy pick-up from hotels in the Nadi region.

Awesome Adventures (☎ 675 0499; www.awesome.fiji.com) The *Yasawa Flyer* sails to South Sea, Bounty and Beachcomber Islands.

Beachcomber Cruises (☎ 666 1500; www.beachcomberfiji.com; one way/return F\$45/77, children under 16/2 half-price/free) Twice-daily transfers to Beachcomber and Treasure Islands. Also leaves from Lautoka.

Malolo Cat I & II (☎ 666 6215; adult/child one way F\$45/22.50) Fast catamarans to Malololailai (Musket Cove and Plantation Island Resorts) three times daily.

South Sea Cruises (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj) Six daily catamaran transfers to: Malolo, Likuliku, Walu Beach and Castaway (F\$65 one way); Mana (F\$70); Treasure/Beachcomber (F\$55); Bounty (F\$50); South Sea Island (F\$30); and Matamanoa, Tokoriki and Amanuca (F\$100).

Prices for quick, scenic flights are comparable to catamaran prices. **Sun Air** (☎ 0800 672 5725, 572 3016; www.fiji.to) has daily flights (if there are enough passengers) from Nadi to Mana (adult/child F\$90/60 one way) and Malololailai (adult/child F\$75/40). Charter flights and helicopters are also an option; see p153 for details. Yachts can be hired at Musket Cove Marina on Malololailai.

Activities

Mamanuca **diving** sites teem with fantastically gaudy fish circling impossibly psychedelic corals. Gotham City is three pinnacles in a passage in the Malolo Barrier Reef; it has soft coral and is named after the batfish. Inside the Malolo Barrier Reef is the famous Supermarket, at a depth of 5m to 30m, where you can see grey, white and black-tip reef sharks and the occasional bronze whaler. North Reef, also known as the Circus, has lots of clown fish, plate corals and nudibranchs.

Many of the resorts have their own dive outfits. **Subsurface Fiji** (☎ 666 6738; www.subsurfacefiji.com), based at the First Landing Resort (p156) north of Nadi, is a well-respected operation servicing numerous islands. A two-tank dive/PADI open water course costs F\$190/560. See p153 for other outfits based in Nadi.

Tours

Day cruises to the Mamanucas from Nadi are exceedingly popular and generally include transfers from Nadi hotels, lunch and basic water activities.

Blue Lagoon Cruises (☎ 666 1622; www.bluelagooncruises.com) and **Captain Cook Cruises** (☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au; adult/child F\$95/47.50) offer combined cruises of the Mamanucas and Yasawas; see p185 for details. Captain Cook cruises also offers a starlight dinner cruise aboard MV *City of Nadi* (adult/child F\$99/50, three hours), including an à la carte three-course meal.

Oceanic Schooner Company (☎ 672 2455; funcruises@connect.com.fj; per person F\$165) offers a five-island champagne cruise aboard the 30m schooner *Whale's Tale*, stopping at Honey-moon and Nukuimana Islands.

South Sea Cruises (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj) has a full-day catamaran and sailing cruise to three uninhabited islands, including a village visit (F\$165/90 adult/child). There are also day cruises to Castaway (F\$125/85 adult/child), Mana (F\$115/60 adult/child), Malolo (F\$115/60 adult/child), Treasure (F\$115/60 adult/child) and South Sea Islands (F\$99/50 adult/child).

More options:

Beachcomber Cruises (☎ 672 3828, 666 1500; www.beachcomberfiji.com; full-day tour adult/child F\$80/40) Day trips to Beachcomber Island.

Coral Cats (☎ 651 3475; sailfiji@connect.com.fj; per person F\$130) Small-group day cruises around the Mamanuca islands on a high-speed catamaran.

SOUTH SEA ISLAND

This tiny, flat, sandy island used to be known as Aqualand and is a fun and friendly option for budget travellers and day-trippers.

In the middle of the island, **South Sea Island** (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com; dm incl meals F\$75; ☎) is one double-storey *bure* with a restaurant and bar downstairs and a forest of beds (mostly bunks) upstairs. The main dorm has 32 beds and there are two six-bed family dorms. The beach is good for swimming and OK for snorkelling, and there's plenty of free water-play equipment. Diving is with **Reef Safari** (☎ 675 0950; www.reefsafari.com.fj), with two-tank dives/open water courses for F\$170/530.

See p179 for information on getting to South Sea Island.

BOUNTY ISLAND

area 0.02 sq km

One of the best options for budget travellers, Bounty is a 20-hectare coral island with a pristine marine reserve and spectacular

snorkelling. Hawksbill turtles nest on the island's white-sand beach and the interior is home to the rare Fiji crested iguana.

The **Bounty Island Resort** (☎ 651 1271; www.fiji-bounty.com; dm/d/f F\$50/145/240; ☎) has flashy double *bure* and a mix of old and new family *bure*, all with air-con, fridge and bathroom. They're super clean and each has ocean views and hammocks. The dorms are spotless but can get a bit hot. Meal packages are F\$35 per person and servings are generous. Children under 12 are half-price. Non-motorised activities, including snorkelling, canoeing and kayaking, are free and diving is with Subsurface Fiji (see opposite).

See p179 for information on getting to Bounty Island.

BEACHCOMBER ISLAND

area 0.2 sq km

Sitting about 20km offshore, tiny Beachcomber Island (Tai) is covered entirely by a resort and circled by a beautiful beach. It has a reputation for revelry and generally attracts a young crowd.

The **Beachcomber Island Resort** (☎ 666 1500; www.beachcomberfiji.com; dm/s/d incl meals from F\$90/195/270; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a party place, catering for up to 250 energetic guests; a constant streak of day-trippers also peeps up the numbers. The colossal dorm *bure* is a crowded affair. There are also modest twin rooms set back from the beach, rustic duplex *bure* and six premium beachfront *bure* – all with fridge and private bathroom. Entertainment includes live music and frenetic dancing on the sand dance floor in the big, lively bar.

Snorkelling equipment is free for house guests. Also on offer are water-skiing (F\$35), parasailing (F\$65), wakeboarding (F\$35) and jet-skiing (F\$65 per 15 minutes). Diving is through Subsurface Fiji (see opposite). A kids' club operates during the Australian and NZ school holidays.

Transfer is by the resort's catamaran service or South Sea Cruises (see p179).

TREASURE ISLAND

area 0.06 sq km

The coral Treasure Island (Elevuka) is covered in tropical gardens and ringed by a white-sand beach.

Treasure Island Resort (☎ 666 6999; www.fiji-treasure.com; d/f F\$530/1050; ☎ ☎ ☎) is paradise for both honeymooners and families, with

landscaped tropical gardens that cover the entire island and comfortable beachfront *bure* with hammocks. There's an excellent kids' club, baby-sitting and nightly entertainment in the open dining room/bar. Nonmotorised activities are free and diving is with Subsurface Fiji (see opposite).

South Sea Cruises and Beachcomber Cruises offer transfers here (see p179).

NAVINI

area 0.25 sq km

Surrounded by a white-sand beach and offshore reef, teeny Navini looks like a round wafer biscuit topped with thick pesto, and is just as delicious.

There are only 10 *bure* in the exquisite **Navini Island Resort** (☎ 666 2188; www.navinifiji.com; d F\$500-690; ☎), all within 10m of the beach. Cheapest are the small but comfortable one-bedroom *bure*. Duplex *bure* have sitting rooms and the more spacious 'premier' *bure* have verandas. Honeymoon *bure* have a private courtyard and spa. A three-meal plan of fresh and fabulous food costs F\$100 for adults, F\$55 for children aged six to 12, F\$40 for two- to five-year-olds and F\$20 for kids under two per day.

Snorkelling is excellent just off the beach and kayaking, windsurfing and village and fishing trips are free. Diving is with Subsurface Fiji (see opposite).

Guests are picked up from Nadi or Lautoka hotels; return transfers cost F\$200/100/600 for adult/child/family.

MALOLOLAILAI

area 2.4 sq km

Tranquil Malololailai is the second-largest of the Mamanuca Group and encompasses three resorts, a marina and, on the hill above Musket Cove, a kitschy art/gift shop, **La Galerie** (☎ 651 0050), with a small book exchange.

Festivals & Events

MUSKET COVE MARINA

In September each year the **Musket Cove Yacht Club** (☎ 666 2215; fax 666 2633; www.musketcovefiji.com) hosts Fiji Regatta Week and the Musket Cove to Port Vila yacht race. Yachts can anchor at the marina for F\$10/60/220 per day/week/month. The marina also offers a choice of charter yachts, ranging in size from 6m to 32m.

Activities

SURFING

Jacob ('Scobie') operates boat transfers to the excellent surf breaks at Malolo and Wilkes Passages. Contact him through the island's dive shop or on ☎ 925 8778 (or through his mum, Viema, on ☎ 923 0828). Rates per person for one/two or three/four or five people are F\$40/30/25.

Sleeping & Eating

Musket Cove Island Resort (☎ 666 2215; www.musketcovefiji.com; d F\$250-540; 🍽️) Overlooking a lagoon, this serene resort has a range of accommodation, including hotel rooms and self-catering *bure*. The newer Armstrong Island villas (F\$660), clustered on an artificial island, have over-water verandas and a private pool, TVs and DVD players. Lagoon *bure* are nicely decorated and resort villas boast their own spa pools. Windsurfing, canoeing, hand-line fishing and snorkelling are free. Two-/three-meal plans at Dick's Place (see below) cost F\$70/85 for adults and F\$45/35 for children.

Plantation Island Resort (☎ 666 9333; www.plantationisland.com; d/f from F\$250/470; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺) Pure fun for families, Plantation teams with kids in the sea, in the pool, painting T-shirts, climbing plaster cows, egg-and-spoon racing...or just watching TV and eating chips. Accommodation includes the popular two-bedroom garden *bure* which feature large lounge areas and big, clean bathrooms. The new Plantation Village double rooms are bright and cheerful, with enclosed patios. Two-/three-meal packages are F\$40/60. There's also a shop and a Sunset Bar. Activities include snorkelling, canoeing, windsurfing, paragliding and lawn bowls. Plantation Divers charges F\$145/640 for a two-tank dive/unlimited diving.

Dick's Place (☎ 666 2215; meals F\$14-25; 🍽️ breakfast/lunch/dinner) Musket Cove resort's restaurant serves international cuisine with some Indian and Fijian dishes and weekly BBQs. Thursday night is *meke* night, when the only food available is pig on a spit and an accompanying buffet.

Coffee Cove (☎ 666 2215; meals F\$12.50; ☕ 10am-6pm) Good-value, bistro-style lunches are served overlooking a lagoon here, plus it's BYO. Order BBQ packs by 4.30pm; they include a choice of meats, green salad, potatoes and garlic bread (F\$16). Snacks, coffee and ice creams are also served.

More sleeping and eating options:

Lomani Island Resort (☎ 666 8212; www.lomaniisland.com; d F\$580, st incl breakfast F\$630; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺) Intimate, adults-only resort with classy accommodation and an excellent restaurant.

Ananda's Restaurant (☎ 666 9333; mains F\$20; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) Huge menu and alfresco, kid-friendly dining.

Musket Cove Trader (☎ 666 2215; 🕒 8am-7pm) Well-stocked general store, great for yachties.

Getting There & Away

The Malolo Cat catamaran operates transfers from Denarau, and Sun Air has a shuttle service from Nadi. See p180 for details.

MALOLO

The daddy of the Mamanuca Group has two villages, three resorts (with another under construction), mangroves and coastal forest. The island's highest point, **Uluisol** (218m), offers panoramic views of the Mamanucas and southern Yasawas.

Appealing to the surfer/backpacker market, **Funky Fish Beach Resort** (☎ 651 3180; www.funkyfishresort.com; dm/d F\$30/80, f from F\$120; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺) has bright *bure* with outdoor showers and a sand-floor bar serving good Australian wines and impressive food. There's also good snorkelling and access to the best surf breaks. Diving is with Subsurface Fiji (see p180). There are no direct transfers, but the resort will collect you from **Malolo Island Resort** (☎ 672 4275; www.maloloisland.com; r F\$550-1060; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺), which has a good beach, kids' club and hillside restaurant. The **Resort Walu Beach** (☎ 665 1777; www.walubeach.com; dm incl meals F\$90, r F\$450-690; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺) is slightly generic but has a great bar and food.

Transfers to Malolo Island are with South Sea Cruises or Malolo Cat (see p180), or seaplane (see p153).

CASTAWAY ISLAND

area 0.7 sq km

Reef-fringed, 70-hectare Castaway Island, also known as Qalito, is 27km west of Denarau.

The simple and spacious *bure* at the family-friendly **Castaway Island Resort** (☎ 666 1233; www.castawayfiji.com; d from F\$680, f F\$1780; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺) have white brick walls and thatched roofs, giving them an English-country look. The interiors are a little shabby but are being

gradually renovated. There is a swimming pool/bar, open-air pizza bar with sea views, fabulous dining terrace (all-day casual meals F\$15, à la carte dinner F\$42) and kids' club/baby-sitting service. Castaway Dive Centre charges F\$105/690/710 for one-tank dives/unlimited dives/open water courses.

South Sea Cruises (see p180), Pacific Island Seaplane and Island Hoppers (see p153) offer transfers.

MANA

Beautiful Mana has good snorkelling and diving and a peppering of hills with spectacular views. Upmarket Mana Island Resort stretches for over 80 hectares between the north and south beaches, and there are three budget resorts, popular with partying British and Irish backpackers. Check out the south beach pier, where the fish go into a frenzy under the night lights.

Reef Safari (☎ 675 0950; www.reefsafari.com.fj) is an excellent dive outfit servicing the backpacker resorts. The diving and snorkelling sites are uncrowded and the reef talks are inspiring. Two-tank dives/night dives/open water courses cost F\$170/100/450.

Sleeping & Eating

A manned guard post and a high fence separate the three backpacker resorts from the Mana Island Resort, like a mini Berlin wall, dividing the wealthy west from the ragged poor in the east. It was erected during a period of aggressive competition between the resorts, but although the boundary still stands, the mood has long since improved. The backpacker resorts are sewn into a ramshackle new Fijian village. To reach them, get off at the ferry wharf, turn left, and walk through the village.

Mana Island Lodge (☎ 681 3436; manalodge2@yahoo.com; dm/d incl meals from F\$60/130) The newest of the backpacker places has brand-new fan-cooled *bure* with bathrooms and an eight-bed en suite dorm. At the time of writing, there was a restaurant here but no bar. Snorkel hire costs F\$10 but snorkelling boat trips are free, island hopping is F\$45 and fishing F\$30. Diving is through Reef Safari (see above).

Ratu Kini Backpackers (☎ 672 1959; www.ratukini.com; camping per person F\$35, dm F\$45, s/d from F\$75/95) Most of the accommodation here is set back from the beach in gardens, so the resort is

almost indistinguishable from the village. The newest rooms have big, comfortable beds. The lively bar here overlooks the beach and is the centre of backpacker nightlife. Rates include huge meals and activities include snorkelling trips (F\$10 per person, plus F\$10 snorkel hire), kayaking (F\$5 per hour) and visits to Monuriki, the island where the movie *Cast Away* was shot (F\$50 per person, including snorkel and lunch). Diving is through Reef Safari (see left).

Mereani's Backpackers Inn (☎ 651 3359, 995 6446; www.manaislandbackpackers.com; dm/s/d incl meals F\$45/75/95; 🍽️) All doubles have a double bed, a single bed and a fan, apart from one which is air-conditioned. All facilities are shared. The eight-bed dorm has two double rooms, and there's a large 20-bed mixed dorm in the village. Activities include reef-fishing trips (F\$5), four-island sightseeing (F\$35), a Tom Hanks picnic (F\$50) and snorkelling. Diving is through Reef Safari (see left).

Mana Island Resort (☎ 666 1455; www.manafiji.com; d incl breakfast F\$340-510, st incl breakfast F\$790-1070; 🍽️ 🍷 🍺 🍻) One of Fiji's largest island resorts, this Japanese owned complex offers stylish accommodation. The honeymoon *bure* have a very long deck overlooking a lovely separate cove, shared only with other honeymooners. Garden *bure* sleep up to four people, and deluxe ocean-view air-con *bure* are spacious, elevated and have a porch. There are two restaurants (lunch F\$16, dinner F\$55 for five courses), three bars, tennis courts and a free kids' club. Children under 12 stay free and rates include all nonmotorised water sports. Diving is with **Aqua-Trek** (☎ 670 2413; www.aquatrekdiving.com) and costs F\$190/700 for a two-tank dive/open water course.

Getting There & Away

Guests of Mereani's and Ratu Kini can use the resort's own *Mana Flyer* transfer boat (F\$80 return). Mana is serviced by South Sea Cruises catamarans, but flying with Sun Air is the quickest way to get to the island (see p179).

MATAMANOVA

Covered in dense vegetation, dotted with coconut palms and fringed by white-sand beaches, Matamanoa is a secluded and hilly island just north of Mana.

The mid-sized **Matamanoa Island Resort** (☎ 672 3620; www.matamanoa.com; d incl breakfast F\$330-510; 🏠 🍽️ 🚿) has 20 *bure* on a high point with verandas and views of a lovely beach, plus 13 good-value air-con units with garden views. Daily two-/three-meal plans cost F\$75/50 and there is a three-night minimum stay. No children under 12 are allowed.

Activities include a trip to a nearby pottery village on Tavua and diving is with **Aqua-Trek** (☎ 670 2413; www.aquatrekdiving.com; two-tank dives/open water courses F\$190/700).

Most guests arrive via a **South Sea Cruises** (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj; F\$100) catamaran.

TOKORIKI

Near the northern end of the Mamanucas, this small island has a beautiful, long white-sand beach and a remote feel.

Gorgeous **Tokoriki Island Resort** (☎ 666 1999; www.tokoriki.com; bure d F\$830, villas d F\$1100; 🏠 🍽️ 🚿) is one for the couples (children under 12 aren't welcome). Tasteful and comfortable *bure* are just a few steps from the beach and the five new villas have private plunge pools and large sandstone terraces. Lunch is served on a pleasant terrace and gourmet, candle-lit dinners in the à la carte restaurant.

Dive Tropex Tokoriki (www.tokorikidiving.com) charges F\$190/100/640 for a two-tank dive/night dive/open water course. It has an interesting giant clam-farming dive site nearby and visits some pristine local sites, including Fiji's only blue coral.

Most guests fly to Tokoriki or take a catamaran with **South Sea Cruises** (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj; F\$100). Seaplane or helicopter are also options (see p153).

TAVARUA

area 0.12 sq km

This small coral island is at the southern edge of the Malolo Barrier Reef which encloses the southern Mamanucas. Rimmed by beautiful white-sand beaches, it's close to Cloudbreak and Restaurants surf breaks.

Popular with American surfers, **Tavarua Island Resort** (☎ 672 3513; www.tavarua.com; s/tw incl meals F\$300/450) has accommodation in simple *bure* along the beach. Transfers from Nadi and surf trips are included and there's a minimum one-week stay.

Bookings need to be made well in advance through **Tavarua Island Tours** (☎ 805 686 4551; fax 805 683 6696) in California.

NAMOTU

area 0.0015 sq km

Namotu, a tiny (1.5 hectares) and pretty island next to Tavarua, is first and foremost a surfing resort, although game fishing is also popular here.

Steeped in Balinese decorations, **Namotu Island Resort** (☎ 670 6439; www.namotuisland.net; 🏠 🍽️ 🚿) brings a little bit of Indonesia to Fiji. If you don't surf – or at least fish – you might think you're on the wrong planet. Surf breaks include Swimming Pool, one of Fiji's cleanest waves, and the consistently surfable Namotu Lefts (both exclusive to the resort), and Wilkes Passage. Diving is with Subsurface Fiji (see p180) and the resort arranges transfers from the mainland. Generally, guests book in advance through **Waterways Surf Travel** (www.waterwaystravel.com) in Malibu. No children under 12.

YASAWA GROUP

Like the Mamanucas, the Yasawas enjoy dazzling dry sunshine, glassy lagoons and vivid snorkelling and diving. But dotted across 90km of reef, these 20 volcanic islands are grander in stature, their beaches a little emptier and landscapes a tad more rugged. Technology is an enigma and any stay longer than a day will nudge you surreptitiously into the true meaning of 'Fiji time'. Backpacker lodges have dominated here, but fancier digs are beginning to emerge.

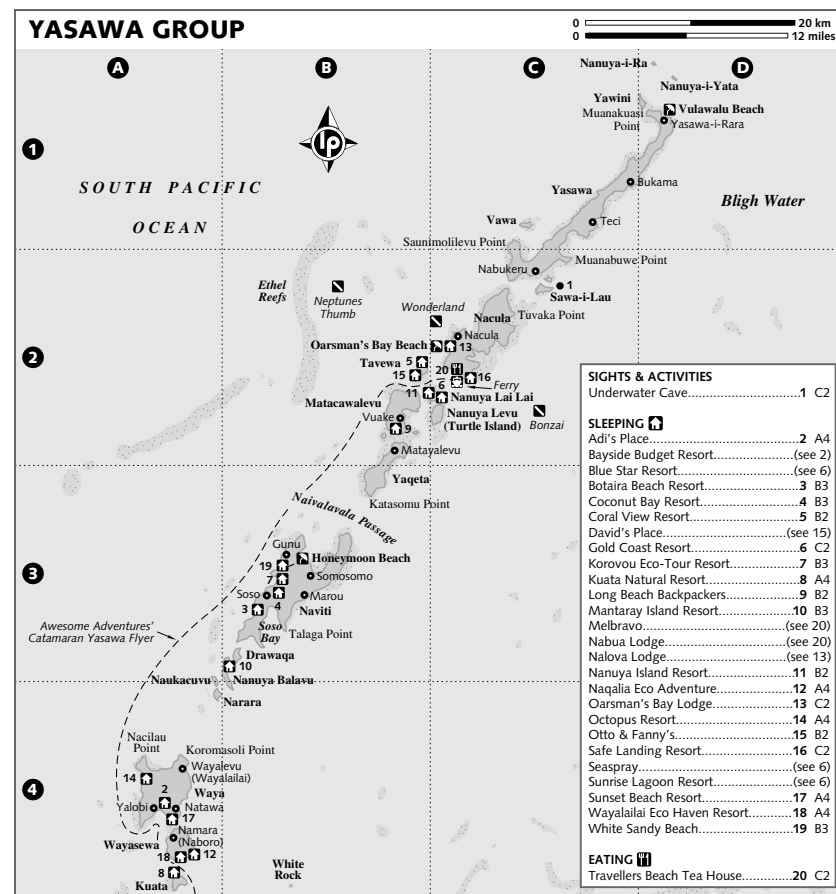
Dangers & Annoyances

Some budget resorts offer their own, cheaper boat transfers to the Yasawas. The long trip is across an exposed stretch of water and weather conditions can change quickly. It's worth checking beforehand if boats have sufficient life jackets and a marine radio.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The *Yasawa Flyer*, operated by **Awesome Adventures Fiji** (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com), is a 25m catamaran with toilets, air-con and



snack bar that departs Denarau Marina at 9.15am daily and stops by every island in the group. Fares from Denarau include Kuata, Wayasewa or Waya (F\$75); Naviti (F\$80); and Tavewa (F\$95). Inter-island fares are around F\$60. Many resorts also charge a minimal (F\$5 to F\$10) transfer fee to collect guests from the Flyer. Island hoppers should consider a 'Bula Pass' (F\$250/ 370/400 seven/14/21 days) which enables unlimited travel but only one return to Denarau.

Awesome Adventures also offers three-/seven-night accommodation packages from F\$300/800 per person, but if you're looking for flexibility you're better off booking your accommodation separately.

At the time of writing there was rumour of another company commencing transfers to the Yasawa islands, departing from Lautoka.

Turtle Airways (☎ 672 1888; reservations@turtleairways.com) has daily seaplanes from Nadi to Tavewa Island (around F\$300, 35 minutes).

Tours

CRUISES

Floating hotel/cruise ships are a comfortable option for visiting the Yasawas. They generally include island and village visits and mainland transfers, and rates for children under 15 years are heavily discounted.

Captain Cook Cruises (☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au; 15 Narewa Rd, Nadi) Has four- and seven-night Mamanuca and Yasawa cruises

onboard the 68m MV *Reef Escape* with a swimming pool, bars, lounges and air-con. Accommodation ranges from cabins with bunk beds up to deluxe staterooms. Prices per person, twin share, including all meals and activities (except diving) start at F\$1260/2640 for three/seven nights. Children under two years old travel for free and those under 15 pay from F\$350.

Blue Lagoon Cruises (☎ 666 1622; www.bluelagoon.com; 183 Vitogo Pde, Lautoka) Offers cruises aboard huge motor-yachts from F\$1130/2480 for two/four nights per twin-share cabin. Seven-day Gold Club Cruises aboard the luxury MV *Mystique Princess* start at F\$4950 for a twin-share cabin. Children under 15 pay 11% to 15% depending on the cruise and those under two are free. Transfers, cruise activities and food are included.

Awesome Adventures (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com) Three-night cruises on board the 27m *Wanna Taki* catamaran cost F\$330 per person, including meals, transfers and activities. The food is excellent and, although the boat looks snug, these trips are fun and relaxed, and travellers rave about them.

KAYAKING

Australian-operated **Southern Sea Ventures** (☎ 02-8901 3287; www.southernseaventures.com) runs nine-day kayaking safaris through the Yasawas from May to October. Safaris cost from A\$1965 per person.

SAILING SAFARI

Captain Cook Cruises (☎ 670 1823; www.captaincook.com.au) has sailing trips to the southern Yasawas aboard the tall-ship SV *Spirit of the Pacific*. Accommodation is in simple thatched *bure* ashore, or canvas beds below deck. Snorkelling, fishing, village visits and *lovo* feasts are included. Prices per person, twin share, for a three-/four-day trip are F\$510/680.

KUATA

Petite and spectacular Kuata has unusual volcanic rock formations, caves, coral cliffs on the southern end and great snorkelling just offshore.

Sitting on a coarse sandy beach with Wayasewa hovering in the foreground, **Kuata Natural Resort** (☎ 666 9020, 933 4508; camping/dm/d incl meals F\$45/55/130) appeals to unfussy backpackers with a 20-bed and 10-bed dorm and

traditional en suite *bure* tightly arranged around the gardens. Standards are simple but the emphasis is on fun. The other side of the island has a nice beach and the best snorkelling. Transfers from the *Yasawa Flyer* cost F\$10 (see p184).

WAYASEWA

Also known as Wayalailai (Little Waya), Wayasewa has good coral reefs. It's dominated by Vatuvula, a volcanic rock face gazing out at visitors as they arrive. The hike to the top is a fun scramble and views take in the whole Yasawa Group.

Sleeping & Eating

Wayalailai Eco Haven Resort (☎ 666 9715, 672 1377; www.bbr.ca/Wayalailai; camping/dm/s incl meals F\$30/40/45, d incl meals F\$110-200) Owned and operated entirely by villagers, this two-tiered budget resort is tucked squarely beneath Vatuvula's granite façade. There are bamboo and thatched *bure* overlooking the ocean, wooden bunked dorms and snug singles and doubles in the ageing former schoolhouse. Diving is with **Dive Trek Wayasewa** (☎ 666 9715; two-tank dives/PADI open water courses F\$110/350).

Naqalia Eco Adventure (☎ 666 1572, 932 3446; camping incl meals F\$35) Around the corner from Wayalailai, this rudimentary camp is operated by two of the clans on Wayasewa. It's a quiet option and great for keen hikers and campers.

Getting There & Away

Transfers to and from the *Yasawa Flyer* cost F\$5 (see p184). Wayalailai offers transfers to Viti Levu in a small boat (F\$60 one way, about 1½ to two hours, Monday to Saturday).

WAYA

With rugged hills, beautiful lagoons and a periphery of long sandy beaches, Waya is exquisite on the eyes. One for the walkers, it also has a good network of trails snaking through the tropical vegetation of its hilly centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Octopus Resort (☎ 666 6337; www.octopusresort.com; camping per tent incl meals F\$90, dm incl meals F\$80, d incl meals F\$145-200; ☒ ☒) Although it's one of the oldest resorts, the Octopus has evolved into

a chic Shangri-la. Stylish *bure* (some family-sized) are tiled and fan cooled, and come with roofless showers. The dorm is the best in the Yasawas (if not all of Fiji!) and camping is in large domed tents. The swanky bar-restaurant dishes up chilled tunes and fabulous food. At low tide the beach has good snorkelling and a secluded atmosphere. Baby-sitting is available and the resort's excellent dive outfit charges F\$150/480 for a two-tank dive/PADI open water course.

Sunset Beach Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6383; dm/d incl meals F\$55/140) Behind a wide curve of beach, this small and quiet resort has a basic five-bed dorm and five double *bure* with private bathroom. Accommodation is all thatched, as is the dining room which has a sand floor and long communal tables. The swimming here is lovely and you can walk across a tidal sandbar to Wayasewa. Transfers to and from the *Yasawa Flyer* are F\$10.

Small, budget options:

Adi's Place (☎ 665 0573, 9926 377; camping/dm/d incl meals F\$25/35/80)

Bayside Budget Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6383; dm/d incl meals F\$40/100)

Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* comes past Yalobi Bay daily (F\$75 per person each way; see p184). Octopus Resort operates its own transfers from Lautoka and Nadi in a solid, covered boat; one way costs F\$65/35 per adult/child.

NAVITI & AROUND

area 33 sq km

One of the largest and highest (up to 380m) of the Yasawa islands, Naviti has a rugged volcanic profile and a dazzling snorkelling site where you can swim with manta rays. Korovou, Coconut Bay and White Sandy Beach resorts share a protected stretch of white-sand beach, but the swimming is bad due to a bank of dead and ugly reef. Fortunately, a short track (around a 10-minute walk) provides access to the pretty and secluded Honeymoon Beach.

Sleeping & Eating

Coconut Bay Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 1300; dm/d incl meals F\$45/120) A warm and friendly resort with roomy dorms and spotless doubles in duplex buildings, this spot is ideal for budget travellers looking to avoid the

party hype. The food is excellent and if you're here for a curry night you've hit the jackpot.

Mantaray Island Resort (☎ 664 0520; www.mantarayisland.com; camping/dm incl meals F\$25/35, d incl meals F\$100-150) Occupying its own wee island on a lovely beach with wide ocean views, Mantaray has a classy wooden dorm and beachfront *bure*. The resort also has an eco-bent and uses compost toilets.

Botaira Beach Resort (☎ 675 0499; www.botaira.com; dm incl meals F\$70, d incl meals from F\$280) This resort extends over a long patch of secluded beach thick with palm trees. Guests enjoy plenty of privacy in spacious timber *bure* with high roofs and bright bathrooms. The swimming and snorkelling are lovely. Botaira is a romantic spot for couples but it caters to all age groups.

Also available:

Korovou Eco-Tour Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 2244; korovou@connect.com.fj; camping/dm incl meals F\$35/55, d incl meals F\$130-160) Pack-em-in resort appealing to a younger crowd. Two-tank dive/open water course F\$170/530.

White Sandy Beach (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 1360; dm/d incl meals F\$55/130) Small and personable. Two-tank dive F\$170.

Getting There & Away

Boat transfers to all of the above resorts are F\$80 each way with the *Yasawa Flyer* (see p184).

TAVEWA

area 3 sq km

This small, low island houses some of the Yasawa Group's northern-most resorts. A pleasant beach unfurls itself on the south-eastern coast but it's often plagued by buffeting trade winds. Head to Savutu Point, just around the bend, for relief from the gales and lovely snorkelling. An ambling ascent to the top of the central crest affords photogenic views of the Yasawas, particularly at sunset.

Westside WaterSports (☎ 666 1462, 998 862; westside@divefiji.com) is an excellent dive operation catering to guests on surrounding islands. A two-tank dive/PADI open water course costs F\$160/580.

Sleeping & Eating

These resorts offer boat trips to the Blue Lagoon (F\$10) and Sawa-i-Lau caves (F\$25; see p189).

Otto & Fanny's (☎ 666 6481; dm/d F\$45/90) Skirting flat grassy grounds with plenty of palms, this homy place has just five *bure* with private bathrooms and a 12-bed dorm. Two of the *bure* sleep up to four people, with one more secluded in the jungle and near the beach. Travellers talk the meals up here (meal packages per person cost F\$50), and the afternoon tea and accompanying cakes (F\$1.50) are the stuff of legend.

Coral View Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 8876; coral@connect.com.fj; camping/dm incl meals F\$35/55, d incl meals F\$130-180) This constantly expanding resort has a steady buzz thanks to its spunky staff and range of accommodation. There's a light and comfortable 16-bed dorm, spartan standard *bure* and swish new deluxe *bure* that are the best on the island. Unfortunately, the beach is virtually nonexistent but the resort offers plenty of activities.

David's Place (☎ 672 1820, 665 2820; davidspacersort@yahoo.com; camping/dm incl meals F\$35/60, d incl meals F\$180) Also occupying capacious grounds, this resort has an abundance of simple *bure* with double beds, lights and mosquito nets. The more expensive deluxe *bure* have private bathrooms and are much more stylish, but there are only two so it's a good idea make a reservation before you arrive.

Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* costs F\$95 (see p184) and **Turtle Airways** (☎ 672 1888; reservations@turtleairways.com) seaplane flights from Nadi to Tavewa cost around F\$300.

NACULA

Blanketed with rugged hills and soft peaks, the interior of the third-largest island in the Yasawas is laced with well-trodden paths leading to villages and small coves. Beach devotees will be ecstatic to know that Nacula has spectacular swimming and snorkelling.

Sleeping & Eating

Nalova Lodge (☎ 666 9055; d incl meals F\$195) Teeny Nalova has three homy *bure* with a modicum of furniture, wallpapered floors and simple bathrooms. Breakfast and lunch are enjoyed on your own porch and dinner is served in the small dining room. It enjoys *that* fabulous beach and the staff are lovely.

Safe Landing Resort (☎ 672 2921; nacula@hotmail.com; camping per person F\$12, dm F\$17-35, d F\$125-135) This neat little resort has timber, tiled and fan-cooled *bure* and fabulous deluxe dorms with private bathroom. Standard dorms are simpler, and the cheaper Fijian *bure* are basic thatched huts. The beach isn't huge but it's calm and private. The food (compulsory meal plan costs F\$45/21 per adult/child) is quite good and payment is by credit card only.

Travellers Beach Tea House (8am-6pm) Based in and out of a wee shack, this beachy place serves tea, coffee and cake (all F\$1.50).

Two slightly shambolic but spacious resorts with simple accommodation and meals are **Nabua Lodge** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 6369; dm incl meals F\$50, d incl meals F\$150) and **Melbravo** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 7472; dm incl meals F\$50, d incl meals without/with shower F\$100/150).

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Oarsman's Bay Lodge (☎ 672 2921; nacula@hotmail.com; camping per person F\$22.50, dm/d/f F\$50/140/240; ☒) Rumours about the fabulous beach here begin as a murmur somewhere around the Manucas, building to a swell the further north you head. By the time the *Yasawa Flyer* hits the Nacula vicinity you'll hear just-departed guests waxing lyrical about it. The hype is well founded. A long swathe of powdery sand eases gently into a glassy cerulean sea, offering impossibly clear views to the bottom well past wading height. It's enough to lull even the staunchest workaholic into a halcyon torpor and the snorkelling is fantastic. The best news is that the small and tight-knit Oarsman's Bay Lodge does the beach justice. Clean and crisp *bure*, strung out on either side of the resort, have bright hues, modern bathrooms and private verandas. Families are catered for with interconnecting units. Above the central, open-air dining room is a 13-bed dorm, which has fairly close but atmospheric quarters and a lovely landing with views across the bay. The food here (additional compulsory meal plan per adult/child under 16/child under six F\$50/25/11) is very good, particularly on buffet nights. Payment by credit card only.

Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* costs F\$95 (see p184) and resorts charge a F\$10 transfer fee.

NANUYA LILAI

Home to that celebrated patch of water, the **Blue Lagoon**, Nanuya Lilai is a magnet for snorkellers, divers, luxury cruise boats and yachts who dabble in its gorgeous depths. The lagoon is actually similar to many of the Yasawa Group's lagoons, but the protected beach is lovely and the water is achingly luscious. Several budget resorts reside on the eastern side of the island, where the lagoon is deep and choppy.

Sleeping & Eating

Nanuya Island Resort (☎ 666 7633; www.nanuyafiji.com; d incl breakfast F\$210-350) Right on the Blue Lagoon, this chic, indulgent resort has an understated air and exquisite vistas. Fijian-nouveau *bure* have thatched roofs and elegant interiors and the restaurant (mains F\$12 to F\$25) serves inventive fare.

Gold Coast Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 9484; dm incl meals F\$40, d incl meals F\$120) This smallish resort is a good spot to escape the masses. It offers simple timber *bure* with sand floors and a nice stretch of beach. Meals often feature catch of the day.

Other budget options:

Blue Star Resort (☎ 992 5825; info@bluestarfiji.com; s incl meals F\$80-120, d incl meals F\$90-150) Quiet option with lovely *bure*. Reader-recommended.

Seaspray (☎ 666 8962; dm/d incl meals F\$45/95) Decent dorms.

Sunrise Lagoon Resort (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 9484; dm/d incl meals F\$55/150) Reminiscent of a school camp with slightly sloppy facilities.

Getting There & Away

The *Yasawa Flyer* charges F\$95 (see p184).

MATACAWALEVU

This hilly, volcanic island is protected by the large Nasomo Bay on its eastern side.

The accommodation and facilities at **Long Beach Backpackers** (☎ 666 6644, after the beep dial 3032; dm/d incl meals F\$55/90) are basic, but it sits on a lovely curved beach with a protected lagoon and has good snorkelling nearby. Transfer fees to and from the *Yasawa Flyer* are F\$10 (see p184), or F\$20 to meet the **Turtle Airways** (☎ 672 1888; reservations@turtleairways.com) seaplane at Tavewa Island (around F\$300 to Nadi).

SAWA-I-LAU

At Sawa-i-Lau, underwater limestone rocks are thought to have formed a few hundred metres below the surface and then uplifted over time. Shafts of daylight enter the great dome-shaped cave (looming 15m above the water surface), where you can swim in the natural pool. With a guide, a torch and a bit of courage, you can also swim through an underwater passage into an adjoining chamber. The limestone walls have mysterious indecipherable carvings, paintings and inscriptions. Most Yasawa budget resorts offer trips to the caves (F\$25) and local cruise ships call here.

ROTUMA

pop 3000 / area 30 sq km

Hovering some 450km north of the Yasawas, Rotuma is ethnically and linguistically distinct in Fiji's vast archipelago. The fiercely proud and friendly population carries a legacy of Tongan influence, and visitors are welcomed as participants rather than spectators. Those who make the effort to get here will be rewarded with the experience of a Polynesian outpost. The landscape is punctuated by volcanic craters rising up to 250m, and seabird colonies nest on the offshore islands of Urea, Hatana and Hofliua. The best time to visit is during *Fara*, an annual festivities period beginning on 1 December, when Rotuma's strong work ethic is replaced with six weeks of dancing, parties and general revelry. There are no banks or shops here.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Air Fiji (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj; 185 Victoria Pde, Suva) flies to and from Suva on Wednesday and Friday (F\$860). **Western Shipping** (☎ 331 4467; Naryan Jetty, Suva) operates the *Cagi Mai Ba* from Suva to Rotuma (deck/cabin F\$130/150, 36 hours); call for departure times and dates. Visiting yachts must obtain permission to anchor from the Ahau government station in Maka Bay, on the northern side of the island.

SLEEPING & EATING

The easiest way to stay on Rotuma is through a Rotuman contact or their family. Alternatively, contact the Rotuman Island

Council via the visitor information centres in Nadi or Suva (p147).

Mojito's Barfly (☎ 889 1144; Motusa) has simple rooms with shared facilities, but they are generally reserved for government workers. Mojito's will provide meals on request, given plenty of notice.

OVALAU & THE LOMAIVITI GROUP

area 484 sq km

Rustic and peaceful, this string of islands, just off the east coast of Viti Levu, has an infectious and languid pace that belies its historical significance, for this is where the Fijian nation was made. Picturesque Levuka, Ovalau's main town, was Fiji's earliest European settlement and the country's first capital, but political machinations have long since departed and today Lomaiviti, which literally means 'Middle Fiji', equally literally feels like the middle of nowhere.

South of Ovalau, the tiny coral islands of Lelevia and Caqalai have sandy beaches, good snorkelling and simple budget resorts. Hawksbill turtles visit to lay their eggs and a pod of around 10 humpback whales passes the east coast of Ovalau on their annual migration between May and September.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air Fiji (☎ 344 0139; fax 344 0252; Beach St, Levuka) has daily flights between Suva and Ovalau (F\$65). The airstrip is about a 40-minute drive from Levuka. Minibuses to the airport (F\$5 per person) will pick you up from outside the Air Fiji office or from your hotel on request. A taxi costs about F\$25.

Patterson Brothers Shipping (☎ 344 0125; Beach St) has a bus/ferry/bus service from Levuka to Suva via Natovi (F\$24, four hours); see p215 for more details. You can also opt to stay on the boat at Natovi and sail to Nabuwalu on Vanua Levu, and then continue by bus to Labasa (F\$55, daily except Tuesday).

Levuka is tiny and easy to get around on foot. There is a taxi stand opposite the Westpac bank, where carriers depart for Lovoni. Mountain bikes can be hired in town (see opposite).

LEVUKA

pop 3750

Levuka is one of the most picturesque towns in the South Pacific. Remnants of its colonial past – timber pool halls, offices and stores – litter the streets like preserved props from an old western movie. But the sea and lush green mountains that contain the town are undeniably Fijian. The diverse population of indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, Chinese Fijians, part-European Fijians and the odd eccentric expat enhances the town's enigmatic charm and racial tensions are virtually absent.

Information

Colonial National Bank (Beach St) Foreign exchange.

Levuka Hospital (☎ 344 0221; Beach St)

Ovalau Watersports (☎ 344 0166; www.owlfiji.com; Beach St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–1pm Sat) Dive shop, information centre, tour booking office and Internet access.

Police station (☎ 344 0222; Totoga Lane)

Post office (Beach St) Cardphone outside.

Visitor information centre (☎ 330 0356; Community Centre, Morris Hedstrom Bldg; ☎ 8am–1pm & 2–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–1pm Sat) The Ovalau Tourist Information Centre has friendly and helpful staff.

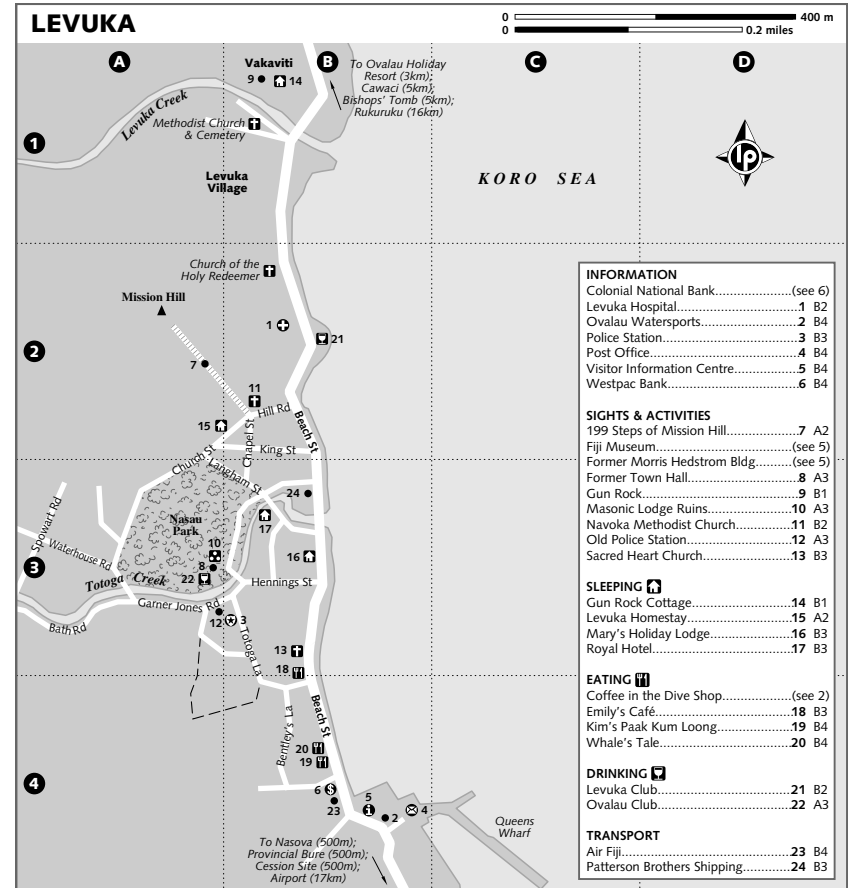
Westpac (Beach St) Foreign exchange, cash advances on Visa or MasterCard and Lomaiviti's only ATM.

Sights

About 10 minutes' walk south of town is **Cession Site**, where the Deed of Cession was signed in 1874. Across the road the **Provincial Bure** sits like a loaf of wholemeal bread covered in straw. Prince Charles made his HQ here when he represented Her Majesty's Government during the transition to independence in 1970.

Downtown stands the former **Morris Hedstrom** trading store (1868), the first in Fiji. Behind its restored façade is a branch of the **Fiji Museum** (admission F\$2; ☎ 8am–1pm & 2–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat), which offers a fascinating, if chaotically organised, glimpse of old Levuka through atmospheric displays.

Other buildings to keep an eye out for include the **Sacred Heart Church** (1858); Levuka's **original police station** (1874); the **Ovalau Club** (1904), Fiji's first private club; and the **former town hall** (1898). You'll also find the stone shell of the South Pacific's first **Masonic Lodge** (1875) and Levuka's only Romanesque building. It was burnt to



a husk in the 2000 coup by villagers egged on by their church leaders. Local Methodists had long alleged that Masons were in league with the devil and that tunnels led from beneath the lodge to the Royal Hotel, through the centre of the world to Masonic HQ in Scotland. Surprisingly, this turned out not to be the case.

The **199 Steps of Mission Hill** are worth climbing for the fantastic view. The simple coral and stone Gothic-style **Navoka Methodist Church** (1864) near the foot of the steps is one of Fiji's oldest churches.

On Langham St, the **Royal Hotel** (1860s) is Fiji's oldest hotel, rebuilt in 1903. Check out the fantastic old snooker room, and play a game of hunt-the-Royal-Hotel-staff.

In **Cawaci**, north of town, Fiji's first two Catholic bishops rest in the Gothic-style **Bishops' Tomb** (1922).

Activities

Cycling is a good way to explore Levuka and its surrounding area. The road to the south is fairly flat, and the north is OK until about Cawaci, after which it gets very hilly. Mountain bikes are available from Ovalau Watersports (opposite), costing F\$10/15 per half/full day.

Excellent **diving** sites in the Lomaiviti waters offer encounters with manta rays, hammerheads, turtles and reef sharks. There's stunning soft coral at Snake Island and Shark Reef in the Moturiki Channel,

and excellent hard coral at Waitovu Passage. Ovalau Watersports offers two-tank dives/open water courses/reef snorkelling trips for F\$150/460/40.

Tours

Epi's Midland Tour (☎ 602 1103, 923 6011; epitours@hotmail.com; per person F\$35, minimum 4; 🚗 departs 10.30-11.30am Mon-Sat) takes you to Lovoni village in the crater of an extinct volcano. Transport is a combination of trekking and local carrier, the scenery is stunning and the storytelling is fantastic. The tour includes lunch in the village and a dip in the river. You can also book through the **Royal Hotel** (☎ 344 0024; www.royallevuka.com).

The Wednesday-only Silana Village Tour includes a *meke*, *lovo* and the chance to make your own handicraft item from coconut and pandanus leaves (F\$30 per person, minimum of six). Book at Ovalau Watersports (p190) or the Royal Hotel before 4pm on Tuesday. Before you set out, ascertain what the tour encompasses that day.

Ovalau Holiday Resort (☎ 344 0329; ohrfiji@connect.com.fj) runs a Waituvu Tour for F\$15 per person. Travellers hike to the peak of Gun Rock, through pine forests and kava plantations, then swim in Waituvu waterfall. Book through Ovalau Watersports (p190).

Ovalau Watersports also offers day trips to Leleuvia or Caqalai (F\$50 per person, including lunch).

Sleeping

Levuka Homestay (☎ 344 0777; www.levukahomestay.com; Church St; s/d incl breakfast F\$120/140) A lovely neocolonial-style house with great sea views from the deck, fantastic service and four big, bright, tremendously clean rooms on separate levels. The never-ending breakfast includes delicious doses of fruit, muesli, toast, banana pancakes, bacon and eggs. There is a high chair and a cot here for babies.

Royal Hotel (☎ 344 0024; www.royallevuka.com; dm/s/d/tr F\$10/18/28/35, cottages F\$80; 🍷 📺 🚿) Fiji's oldest pub is a proud timber building and an institution, with great views from private verandas and a unique colonial atmosphere. Some rooms (and beds) are better than others; try to get a sea-view room. Dorms are in a colonial-style house with kitchen facilities, and air-con cottages are in the front garden.

Ovalau Holiday Resort (☎ 344 0329; ohrfiji@connect.com.fj; camping per person F\$10, dm F\$12, s/d from F\$15/28; 🍷) This relaxing resort has landscaped gardens, a fab restaurant (see below) and a small white-sand beach across the road. Accommodation is in a cluster of comfortable bungalows or family-friendly cabins, which come with private facilities, kitchens and hot water. A taxi from Levuka costs F\$5.

Also available:

Gun Rock Cottage (☎ 344 0166; d F\$65) Fan-cooled one-bedroom, well-maintained cottage. About 1.6km from Levuka (F\$2 by taxi).

Mary's Holiday Lodge (☎ 344 0013; Beach St; dm/s/d incl breakfast F\$15/20/35) Rudimentary but friendly old hotel.

Eating & Drinking

Ovalau Holiday Resort (☎ 344 0329; meals F\$7-13; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This resort restaurant serves a delicious hybrid of Indo-Fijian, Chinese and Western dishes that have become local cuisine. Try it at least once when you are in Levuka – it might be a good idea to ring ahead to warn them you're coming.

Whale's Tale (☎ 344 0235; snacks F\$5-9, three-course dinner F\$17; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Levuka's most tasteful dining experience encompasses reasonable wine and above-par versions of pasta, burgers and fish, served in maritime-themed surrounds. Curiously, the all-day breakfast is not served at breakfast time as the restaurant is closed in the morning.

Kim's Paak Kum Loong (☎ 344 0059; mains F\$8; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Pull up a chair on the balcony and watch Levuka's somnambulant drift go by. Kim's eclectic menu includes standard Chinese dishes, very hot Thai curries and tasty Fijian-style fish, all cooked with flair and care. The big, eclectic buffet (F\$13.50) is the best option in town on Sunday night.

Emily's Café (☎ 344 0382; meals F\$1-7; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) By day, it's an ordinary greasy café fronted by an ordinary Chinese hot bread shop. By night, it's the surprisingly professional Ovalau Pizza, offering crispy, not-too-cheesy pizzas and a bicycle delivery service to local hotels. Delivery is free, but the pizza box will cost you 35 cents!

Coffee in the Dive Shop (snacks F\$3.50; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) A Fijian-run café upstairs at Ovalau Watersports. Drop in for sandwiches or, er, a coffee at the dive shop.

Pleasant drinking holes:

Levuka Club (Beach St) Beer garden with sea and town views.

Ovalau Club (Garner Jones Rd) Atmospheric spot for a beer.

On Thursday local villagers come to sell fresh fruit and vegetables along the waterfront on Beach St. You can get most everything else at the numerous general stores on Beach St.

CAQALAI

The gorgeous coral island of Caqalai comes close to the best a backpacker island can get. It's only a 15-minute walk around the island's beautiful white-sand beaches, which are fringed with palms and other large trees. If you're lucky, you may see dolphins and baby turtles.

The Methodist-run **Caqalai Island Resort** (☎ 343 0366; www.owlfiji.com/caqalai.htm; camping per person with/without meals F\$25/12, dm/bure per person incl meals F\$35/45) is rustic (and dry, of course, but you're welcome to BYO). It has cold showers in shared bathrooms, but the food is delicious, the white-sand beach is scrumptious, snorkelling from the shore is spectacular and the staff are enormously welcoming. At low tide it's possible to walk out to Snake Island (named after the many black-and-white banded sea snakes found here) for even better snorkelling. Diving, village visits, boat trips to tiny Honeymoon Island and Sunday church services also fill the activity board. At night, there is singing, dancing and kava drinking beside a bonfire on the beach. There is a once-a-week trip to Leleuvia (F\$10).

If you're coming from Levuka, book transport and accommodation from Ovalau Watersports (p190). One-way boat transfers

cost F\$20 per person in a group, F\$30 for one person and F\$30 for a same-day return.

From Suva, catch the midday express bus to Korovou (F\$3.30) and ask the driver to drop you off at Waidallice Bridge. A daily boat leaves for Caqalai from the wooden shack at the northern end of the bridge at 2pm. Be warned, the boatride (F\$30, one hour) can be a white-knuckle affair and not for the faint-hearted in choppy conditions.

LELEUVIA

area 0.17 sq km

Just south of Caqalai sits Leleuvia, another palm-fringed coral island with golden-sand beaches. Low tide is a good time to explore the island, when a vast area of sand, rock and tidal pools is exposed. It's also possible to swim off the western side or to do some OK snorkelling and great diving.

The **Leleuvia Island Resort** (☎ 330 1584; www.owlfiji.com/leleuvia.htm; s incl meals F\$45-60) feels a little unkempt and facilities are on the sloppy side, but there are some pretty *bure* and Lena, the manager, is a qualified pastry chef so the food is decent. Guests take breakfast and lunch on the island and dinner on the sand. The beer is cold from the restaurant and hot snorkelling from the beach.

Boat transfers to and from Suva are F\$30 each way (the boat ride is one hour from Korovou township, which is about 90 minutes by bus from Suva), and to and from Levuka costs F\$20 each way (one hour). Book through Ovalau Watersports (p190).

NAIGANI

area 1.5 sq km

Also known as Mystery Island, mountainous Naigani has white-sand beaches, lagoons, a fringing coral reef, the remains of a pre-colonial hillside fortification and 'cannibal

WHAT LIES BENEATH

If you head out to the islands south from Ovalau, your boat will likely travel through Qavo Passage, a break in the reef. Many indigenous Fijians believe that beneath these waters lies a sunken village where ancestral spirits continue to reside. Stories of fishermen hooking newly woven mats are whispered around Levuka. When passing over this *tabu* site, Fijians remove their hats and sunglasses and talk in hushed, reverent tones as it is believed that the spirits are capable of doling out nasty punishments to those who upset them. Whether or not you choose to believe the story, avoid offending and upsetting your hosts – respect their beliefs and follow suit. One tourist who refused to take off his baseball cap when we visited sent a Fijian woman into terrified hysterics.

caves', where 1800 villagers were slaughtered by marauding tribes. They are *tabu* and you should steer clear out of respect.

Naigani's village is about 10 minutes' walk from the unpretentious, family-friendly **Naigani Island Resort** (☎ 330 0925; www.naiganiresort.com; r F\$120-180; ☑). It offers spacious if slightly shabby cabin-style *bure* and great food; every Saturday night is *lovo* night. The white-sand beach here is pretty enough and there is good snorkelling just offshore. The day trip to Picnic Beach is also highly recommended for snorkellers. A free kids' club is available during Australasian school holidays, and baby-sitting is always available at F\$4.50 an hour.

Return transfers per adult/child are F\$50/25 to and from Suva, via Natovi Landing. Return transfers cost the same from Taviya village, near Rukuruku on Ovalau, and a taxi from Taviya costs F\$20. Ovalau Watersports (p190) can arrange transfers for F\$40 one way.

NAMENALALA

area 0.4 sq km

Volcanic Namenalala rests on the Namena Barrier Reef, 25km off the southeastern coast of Vanua Levu. It has lovely beaches and an old **ring fortification**, but the villages disappeared long ago. The island has a nature reserve and is home to seabirds, red-footed boobies and a giant clam farm. From November to February, hawksbill and green turtles lay their eggs on Namenalala beaches.

The exclusive **Moody's Namena** (☎ 881 3764; www.moody'snamena.fiji.com; 5 nights incl meals s/d F\$3190/4570; ☑ closed March and April) resort has just six timber-and-bamboo *bure* on a forested ridge. Free activities include windsurfing, fishing, snorkelling and reef excursions. Diving here (F\$85 per tank) is excellent. Transfers are included and children under 16 years aren't welcome.

VANUA LEVU

pop 139,514 / area 5587 sq km

The 'mainland's' little sibling has a personality all of its own, accented by superb diving and snorkelling, welcoming villages, unspoiled countryside and soothing resorts. The nearby Rainbow Reef has some of the

best dive sites in the South Pacific, and the many deep bays are fantastic for kayaking.

Although it's Fiji's second-largest island and easily accessible, Vanua Levu manages to exude a feeling of remoteness and offers a window into traditional Fijian life. The north and west of the island are virtually untouristed. Favoured by yachties, the southeast is predominantly indigenous Fijian and home to gorgeous landscapes brimming with rainforests, coconut plantations and fantastic views of the ocean. In stark contrast, Savusavu is in the midst of a frantic property boom and restaurants, clubs and resorts seem to be emerging at a furious pace. What this spells for travellers is a healthy balance of tourism and tradition.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air Fiji (☎ 885 0173; Copra Shed Marina, Savusavu) has daily flights from Suva and Nadi to Labasa (F\$190/230) and Savusavu (F\$160/220). **Sun Air** (☎ 885 0141; Copra Shed Marina, Savusavu) flies from Suva/Nadi to Labasa (F\$210/230) and from Nadi to Savusavu (F\$230). Sun Air also has daily flights between Savusavu and Taveuni (F\$115).

Consort Shipping (☎ 330 2877; fax 330 3389; Ground fl, Dominion House Arcade, Thomson St, Suva) sails from Suva to Savusavu at 6pm on Monday and Friday, and noon on Wednesday (cabin/seat F\$80/50, 12 hours). On Wednesday and Friday it continues for another eight hours to Taveuni (from Suva cabin/seat F\$90/55).

Beachcomber Cruises (Lautoka ☎ 666 1500; fax 666 4496; Savusavu ☎ 885 0266; Taveuni ☎ 888 0036) operates the 500-passenger *Adi Savusavu* between Suva and Savusavu (economy/first class F\$45/65, 11 hours), departing Suva at 10am on Tuesday, noon on Thursday and 6pm on Saturday. The boat also travels between Savusavu and Taveuni (economy/first class F\$25/45, five hours), departing Savusavu at 1am on Wednesday and Friday.

Patterson Brothers Shipping (Suva ☎ 331 5644; fax 330 1652; Suites 1 & 2, Epworth Arcade, Nina St; Labasa ☎ 881 2444; Nasekula Rd; Lautoka ☎ 666 1173; 15 Tukani St; Levuka ☎ 344 0125; Beach St) operates a bus from Lautoka to Ellington Wharf on Viti Levu (3½ hours), connecting with the *Ashika* ferry to Nabouwalu (3¼ hours) and then another bus trip to Labasa (four hours). Buses depart from the Lautoka office at 4am on Friday

and Monday, and from Labasa at 6am on Sunday and Wednesday. Patterson Brothers also operates a bus/ferry Suva–Natovi–Nabouwalu–Labasa service (F\$45) on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Grace Ferry (Labasa Gulam Nabi & Sons; ☎ 881 1152; Nasekula Rd; Savusavu Country Kitchen; ☎ 927 1372) runs a daily bus/boat trip from Taveuni to Savusavu and Labasa (F\$20), departing at 8.45am from the Korean Wharf.

SAVUSAVU

pop 4970

Not long ago, Vanua Levu's second-largest centre was a small and dusty peninsular town, easily outclassed by its fabulous views across the bay to the western mountain range. The views haven't changed but recent years have brought a property boom and the main street is now flush with good restaurants, lively bars and well-stocked shops. Scores of expats are putting down roots and the town has welcomed them vibrantly. Aside from the burgeoning population, yachties continue to arrive in increasing numbers and numbers are outgrowing moorings.

Savusavu Bay once saw a great deal of volcanic activity and **hot springs** continue to bubble near the wharf and behind the playing field. Don't even think about bathing in them – they're literally boiling.

Information

ANZ, Colonial National and Westpac banks have branches in the main street. All have ATMs, foreign exchange services and give cash advances on major credit cards.

Curly Cruising & Internet (☎ 885 0122) Yachting information centre, tour office and Internet access.

Customs (☎ 885 0727; ☎ 8am–1pm, 2–4pm Mon–Fri) West of the marinas.

Hospital/Ambulance (☎ 885 0444)

Pharmacist (☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sun)

Next door to the Siloah Clinic.

Police (☎ 885 0222)

Post office At the eastern end of town near Buca Bay Rd.

Savusavu Internet (☎ 885 3250; Westpac Bldg)

Siloah Clinic Private Health Centre (☎ 885 0721; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) Behind Siluven Shipping on the main road.

Sights

Dating back to 1880 and originally one of Fiji's first copra mills, the **Copra Shed Marina** (☎ 885 0457; fax 885 0989; coprashed@connect.com.fj)

has been rebuilt into Savusavu's service hub for tourists and expats. It encompasses a bevy of facilities as well as a small historical display. Moorings in the pretty harbour between Savusavu and Nawi Islet cost F\$10/220 for a day/month in high season, F\$7/150 for a day/month in low season.

Close by is **Waitui Marina** (☎ 885 0536; fax 885 0344; ☑ closed Sunday) based in a beautiful restored boatshed with showers and a private club. Moorings cost F\$10.

Activities

DIVING

Savusavu has excellent dive sites in and around Savusavu Bay, as well as along the coast towards Taveuni. The following companies have good reputations:

KoroSun Dive (☎ 885 2452; www.korosundive.com) Has a dive shop on the jetty. Two-tank/night dives F\$210/130, PADI open water course F\$750.

L'Aventure Jean-Michel Cousteau (☎ 885 0188; laventurefiji@connect.com.fj) Based at the Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort (p198). Two-tank dives F\$250 (without gear), PADI open water course F\$1000.

Tours

Eco Divers-Tours (☎ 885 0122) Advertises a variety of individually tailored village, hiking and kayaking tours (prices vary according to duration). The shop also rents kayaks (from F\$15/55 per hour/day) and mountain bikes (F\$15/25 per hour/day).

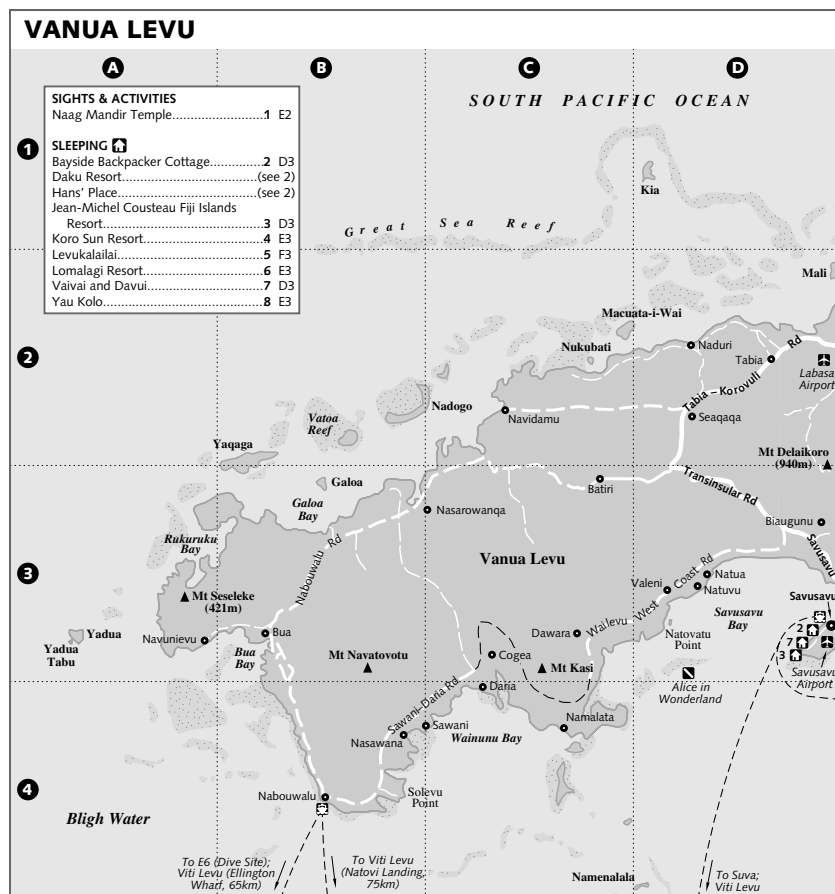
Trip n Tour (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Copra Shed Marina) Offers a range of tours, including the Red Prawn Tour (F\$55/22.50 per adult/child) to Naweni Village, where locals call the unusual prawns which are so red they look cooked to the surface by chanting and slapping the water.

Tui Tai Adventure Cruises (☎ 885 3032; www.tui tai.com; 5 nights s/d from F\$2630/3450) Fantastic cruises between Vanua Levu, Taveuni and more remote islands such as Kioa and Koro. Snorkelling, kayaking, trekking, fishing and diving are par for the course, and dolphins and whales sometimes swim alongside the boat. Accommodation is in en suite air-con cabins.

More tours:

Naveria Heights Lodge (☎ 851 0157; justnaveria@connect.com.fj) Full and half-day mountain-biking (F\$45–75) and hiking (F\$35–65) tours.

SeaHawk Yacht Charters (☎ 885 0787; www.seahawk.fiji.com) Day cruises aboard a 16m yacht with captain, cook and crew. Per person from F\$250.



Sleeping

BUDGET
Bayside Backpacker Cottage (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Lesiaceva Rd; s/d F\$40/50) This granny burl in the grounds of travel agent Eddie Bower's home, 3km from town, is a bargain. There are two single beds, a decent kitchen and a TV and DVD. Snorkelling at the pebble beach across the road is wonderful at high tide. The friendly Bowers will let you use their mountain bikes; otherwise, it's F\$3 by taxi into town.

Hidden Paradise Guest House (☎ 885 0106; s/d incl breakfast from F\$25/50; ☎) Elenoa keeps a clean and friendly hotel with some of the cheapest doubles in Fiji. Rooms are basic and breeze-cooled with shared kitchen,

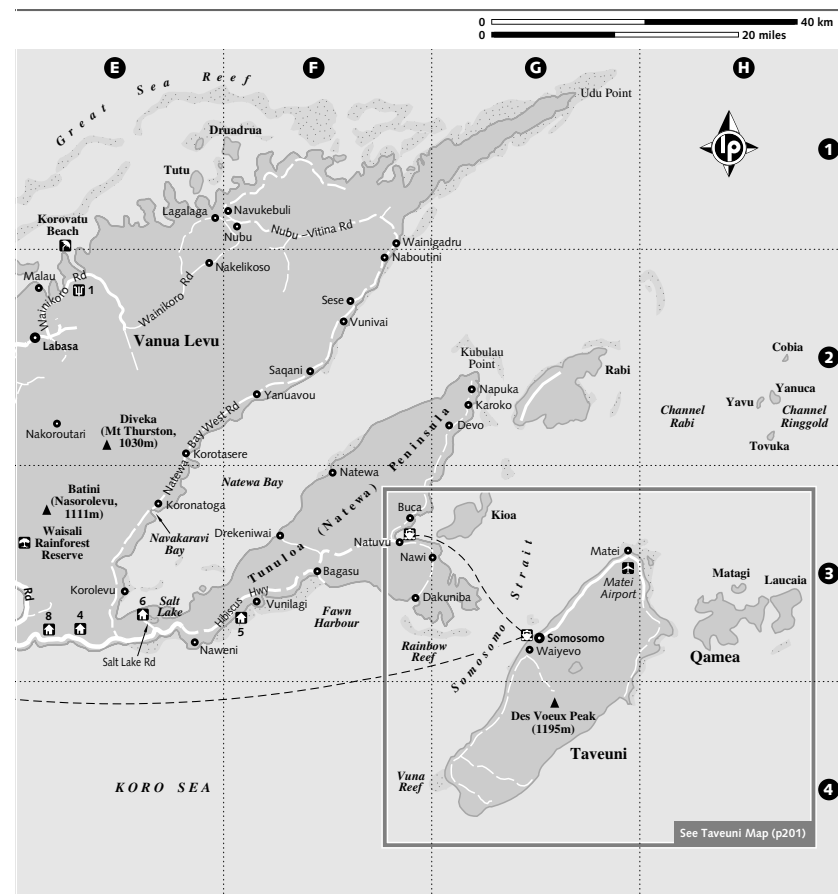
bathrooms and cold-water showers. One room has air-con. Avoid the windowless chamber Elenoa rents out if everything else is full.

Also recommended:
Yau Kolo (☎ 885 3089; yaukolo@yahoo.com; Hibiscus Hwy; tent sites F\$12 per person, on-site tent incl breakfast s/d F\$20/30) Lush campground with two furnished tents and a beer garden.

Vatukaluvu Holiday House (☎ 885 0561; r F\$80) Fully furnished house with hot water and Sky TV. Inquiries through the Copra Shed Marina.

MIDRANGE

Vaivai & Davui (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Vaivai Nov-Apr/May-Oct F\$1320/1495 per week, Davui Nov-Apr/May-Oct F\$1150/1320 per week; ☎) These



two grand two-bedroom, two-bathroom homes have huge decks and extraordinary views over Savusavu Bay. With room for six, Vaivai is the larger and the pick of the two, with a lush garden, a baby cot and even a telescope. The kitchen is equipped with Fisher & Paykel whitegoods, and the reef offers fantastic snorkelling.

Naveria Heights Lodge (☎ 851 0157; justnaveria@connect.com.fj; Naveria Pde; r incl breakfast F\$140; ☎) Owned by a fitness instructor and a massage therapist, this lovely house has unbeatable views, freshly baked bread, fabulously healthy food and excellent hiking and mountain biking. Caters to fitness freaks, couch potatoes and everyone in-between. Call for pick-up.

Hans' Place (☎ 885 0621; www.fiji-holiday.com; Lesiaceva Rd; Yasiyasi studio day/week F\$80/400, Yaka cottage day/week F\$100/500) Just 3km out of town on Lesiaceva Point, these pretty, self-contained cottages are nestled in lush gardens 250m from the sea. Yasiyasi is a studio built of native hardwoods and Yaka is a one-bedroom cottage. They're perfect for couples. Local meals are available on request. It's F\$4 by taxi to and from town.

More midrange options:
Copra Shed Marina (☎ 885 0457; coprashed@connect.com.fj; r F\$165; ☎) Two luxury units with good marina views.
Daku Resort (☎ 885 0046; www.dakuresort.com; Lesiaceva Rd; s/d incl breakfast from F\$95/130; ☎) Quiet resort with sweeping sea views and a range of accommodation.

Hot Springs Hotel (☎ 885 0195; hotsprings@connect.com.fj; r incl breakfast from F\$80; 🍷 🍷) Atmospheric old hotel with harbour views and a majestic deck.

TOP END

Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Islands Resort (☎ 885 0188; www.fijioresort.com; d from F\$920; 🍷 🍷) A beautiful boutique resort with lavish *bure*, gourmet meals (included) and a fabulous kids' club. The snorkelling and diving are as good as you would expect with *that* name attached. Excellent for families. It's F\$5 by taxi to and from town.

Koro Sun Resort (☎ 885 0262; www.korosunresort.com; Hibiscus Hwy; s/d incl meals F\$500/620; 🍷 🍷) Facing a beautiful lagoon 13km east of town, this pretty resort has plush *bure*, tennis courts, a nine-hole golf course, kayaks, bikes, kids' programme and a rainforest spa, where you can make like a Fijian meal and get wrapped in a banana leaf. Taxis to and from Savusavu cost about F\$12.

Eating

Surf & Turf (☎ 851 0966; meals F\$8-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Well trained by the culinary master at Cousteau's resort, the chef here cooks up fabulous...surf and turf dishes, which are devoured in upmarket surrounds. A lobster tail and fillet mignon dinner will set you back F\$50.

Mo's Burgers (☎ 885 3231; snacks F\$6-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The fajitas here are made with baked rotis and the quesadillas with fried rotis, but everything is tasty and fresh in

this mutant Tex-Mex joint so very far from home. As well as burgers, Mo's offers pizza, fish and chips, and chicken and chips.

Decked Out Café (☎ 885 2929; mains F\$6.50; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A fine place to watch the world go by on a sunny day, this big, open deck right on the main street dishes up filling breakfasts, tasty burgers and sandwiches, and delectable fresh-fruit smoothies. There are also large and cheap daily specials.

Daku Resort (☎ 885 0334; meals F\$7-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Spend the F\$3 taxi fare to dine poolside at this resort. Sandwiches, steaks and salads are up for grabs at lunch and at night you can chuck your own seafood or meat on the barbie, or have the chef do it for you.

Savusavu has a Morris Hedstrom Supermarket, a daily market selling fruit and veggies and a **Hot Bread Kitchen** (🍷 6am-8pm Mon-Sat, 6am-1pm Sun) for fresh bread.

Drinking

Waitui Marina (☎ 885 0536) The balcony bar boasts classic South Pacific views of palm trees, yachts and an island beach, and the interior is suitably nautical. The atmosphere is friendly and comfortable and the bar is well stocked.

Savusavu Yacht Club (☎ 885 0685; Copra Shed Marina) It can get a little rowdy on Saturday nights, but otherwise this club has a friendly pub feel about it. Downing a bitter at the waterside tables is a good way to meet the local expats; happy hour is 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

Shopping

D Solanki (☎ 885 0025) Head to this drapers for beautifully made, double-stitched and lined tailored saris at a bargain price. It also sells traditional Fijian dress and Western clothes.

Art Gallery (☎ 885 3054; Copra Shed Marina) and **Tako Handicraft** (☎ 885 3956; Copra Shed Marina) sell jewellery, sculptures, postcards and handicrafts by local artists.

Getting There & Around

Savusavu airstrip is 3km south of town. Local buses pass the airport every so often, but a taxi to or from Savusavu only costs F\$2. See p194 for flight and ferry information for Vanua Levu.

Buses to Labasa (F\$6, three hours, five daily) depart from 7.30am to 3.30pm. Some buses take the longer, scenic route from Savusavu to Labasa along Natewa Bay, departing at 9am (F\$11.50, six hours).

Buses from Savusavu to Napuca (F\$6.30, 4½ hours), at the tip of the Tunulua Peninsula, depart at 10.30am, 1pm and 2.30pm daily.

There are buses from Savusavu to Le-siaveva Point (70c, 15 minutes, five daily except on Sunday) between 6am and 5pm. For confirmation of bus timetables in the south, ring **Vishnu Holdings** (☎ 885 0276).

Carpenters Rental Cars can be booked through **Trip n Tour** (☎ 885 3154; tripntour@connect.com.fj; Copra Shed); prices start at F\$55 a day for a tiny sedan. Bula Re Café (opposite) is an agent for **Budget Rent a Car** (☎ 885 0377), where prices start at about F\$100 a day for a sedan and F\$120 for a 4WD.

TUNULUA PENINSULA

The lush and scenic Tunulua Peninsula is an excellent area to explore by 4WD. If you can arrange a guide in Savusavu or from your resort, it also offers great bird-watching and hiking. The bumpy, rough Hibiscus Hwy passes copra plantations, old homesteads and waving villagers. The road becomes extremely slippery with rain; if driving, double-check the tyres before you set out. There are no restaurants or shops along this route.

About 20km east of Savusavu, the Hibiscus Hwy turns south (right); the turn-off to the north (left) skirts Natewa Bay to Labasa. At Buca Bay the highway turns north (left) through the habitat of the rare silktail bird, sadly listed on the world's endangered-species list.

If you turn south (right) at Buca Bay, you'll head up over the mountain to the village of **Dakuniba**. The going is slow but you'll be rewarded with dazzling views. Just outside Dakuniba, mysterious **petroglyphs** are inscribed on large boulders; be sure to bring a *sevusevu* for the village chief.

The lovely new **Levukalailai** (☎ 888 0888; levukalailai@connect.com.fj; Hibiscus Hwy; d F\$210-250; 🍷) is a resort-in-the-making. It will have a beautiful central lodge, made of exquisitely coloured Australian woods, with four ensuite rooms. The beach is a 5.5km stretch of pristine white sand, the best in Vanua

Levu. Fishing and snorkelling are great and Levukalailai is run on solar power.

Lomalagi Resort (☎ 851 0585; www.lomalagi.com; Salt Lake Rd; d incl meals F\$750; 🍷) has views to die for and is the only resort at the base of Lateva Bay, the largest deep-water bay in the South Pacific. Villas are spacious with big kitchens and decks, but some of the décor is a bit naff. It's perhaps the only resort in Fiji to encourage midnight skinny dipping. Babies are welcome but no 'mobile' children under 12.

LABASA & AROUND

pop 24,095

The air is thick with the smell of molasses in Vanua Levu's largest town. Sitting on the northwestern side of the island's mountain range, about 5km inland on the banks of the meandering Labasa River, Labasa is a sugar town, and crushed cane husks and sugar trains abound. The population is predominantly Indo-Fijian, and Bollywood tunes waft from countless trinket and sari stores.

While Labasa is a bustling trade, service and administrative centre, it doesn't have a lot to offer tourists. Most shops and services can be found on Nasekula Rd, the main street. In an emergency, contact the **police** (☎ 881 1222; Nadawa St) or the **hospital** (☎ 881 1444; Butinikama-Siberia Rd).

Sights

COBRA ROCK

Brightly painted red, yellow and blue, **Naag Mandir Temple** is built around the sacred Cobra Rock. About 3m in height, the rock's natural curved formation resembles a cobra poised to strike. Covered in colourful flower and tinsel garlands, the rock is beseeched with offerings of fruit, fire and coconut milk. Devotees swear that the rock grows in size and that the roof has had to be raised several times over the years. Remove your shoes before entering and circle the rock clockwise three or five times.

Buses from Labasa to Natewa Bay pass the temple; a taxi costs about F\$10. If you're driving, the temple is 10km from the turning for Wainikoro Rd; you'll pass two smaller temples on the way.

Sleeping

Grand Eastern Hotel (☎ 881 1022; grest@connect.com.fj; Rosawa St; r F\$80-130; 🍷 🍷) Labasa's most upmarket hotel has a pleasant colonial

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bula Re Café (☎ 885 0377; meals F\$6.50-15; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; 🍷) The outdoor tables with sweeping bay views are a suitable side dish to the inventive cuisine served at this progressive café. Snappy wordsmiths might describe the fare as mod or Nouveau-Fijian, which is apt if it describes a fusion of traditional and Western styles. Fresh seafood, creative pastas, delicate savoury crepes and excellent salads and curries give you a good indication of what's on offer. Vegetarians are also well catered for here and there are daily specials (lunch/dinner F\$10/17). Bookings are highly recommended for the Wednesday night *lovo* (F\$15).

atmosphere and a decent restaurant. Rooms have small porches with views of the river; it's worth paying the extra for the newer deluxe rooms for the actual river frontage.

Labasa Riverview Private Hotel (☎ 881 1367; fax 881 4337; Nadawa St; dm F\$15, s F\$30, d F\$45, st from F\$50; ☎) Rooms are cosy and comfortable and the five-bed dorm has a clean, well-equipped kitchen. The hotel's bar and veranda overlook the river, and it's probably the best place for a cold beer in Labasa. A five-minute walk north of town, this place is peaceful, relaxed and has a very friendly proprietor.

Eating

Oriental Bar & Restaurant (☎ 881 7321; Jaduram St; meals F\$7; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) Labasa's most atmospheric restaurant serves tasty Chinese dishes and a few Fijian options. No caps or vests are allowed in the Chinese-Fijian interior, and although it feels slightly upmarket the prices are reasonable. Well-stocked bar.

Govinda Restaurant (☎ 881 1364; Nasekula Rd; snacks 30c, meals F\$4-7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurant serves fantastic thalis, samosas and sweets. The F\$4 deal is a delicious, healthy combo of curry, dahl, chutney and rice or two rotis.

Grand Eastern Hotel Restaurant (☎ 881 1022; Rosawa St) The atmospheric restaurant at the Great Eastern Hotel (p199) serves Western-style dishes.

Getting There & Around

For flights head to the office of **Air Fiji** (☎ 881 1188; Nasekula Rd) or **Sun Air** (☎ 881 1454; Northern Travel Service office). The airport is about 11km southwest of Labasa; catch the Waiqe bus (F\$5c, four times daily Monday to Saturday, as per flight schedule on Sunday). A taxi from Labasa costs F\$8. See p194 for flight and ferry details to and from Labasa.

There are regular buses between Labasa and Savusavu (F\$6, five times daily between 7am and 4.15pm, four on Sunday). A 9am bus takes the scenic route (F\$11.50, six hours) to Savusavu along Natewa Bay. Buses to Nabuwalu depart three times daily (F\$8, Monday to Saturday).

Taxis are plentiful, with the main stand near the bus station. **Budget Rent a Car** (☎ 881 1999; Vakamaisuasua) is south of town.

KIOA

The island of Kioa is inhabited by Polynesians originally from the tiny coral reef island of Vaitupu in Tuvalu. The community purchased Kioa in 1947 to reduce population pressure on Vaitupu. The one village is colourful and immaculately kept, and the villagers are known throughout Fiji for their woven crafts. You cannot arrive without an invitation and there's no tourist accommodation. **Tui Tai Adventure Cruises** (☎ 885 3032; www.tuitai.com) visits Kioa.

TAVEUNI

Kaleidoscopic above and beneath, this small island is a haven for divers, bushwalkers and nature lovers. Some of Fiji's highest peaks reside here, including Des Voeux Peak (1195m) and the cloud-shrouded Mt Ulugalau (1241m), the country's second-highest summit. A volcanic past has left black-sand beaches skirting the perimeter, but Lavena and Matei has white sand and lovely swimming. Those seeking to abscond from the beaten track will find opportunity here to do so but the exercise should be tackled with an umbrella. It rains here!

The population is mainly indigenous Fijian with a smaller crowd of Indo-Fijians and expats. There are no big towns and the island's main income comes from agriculture.

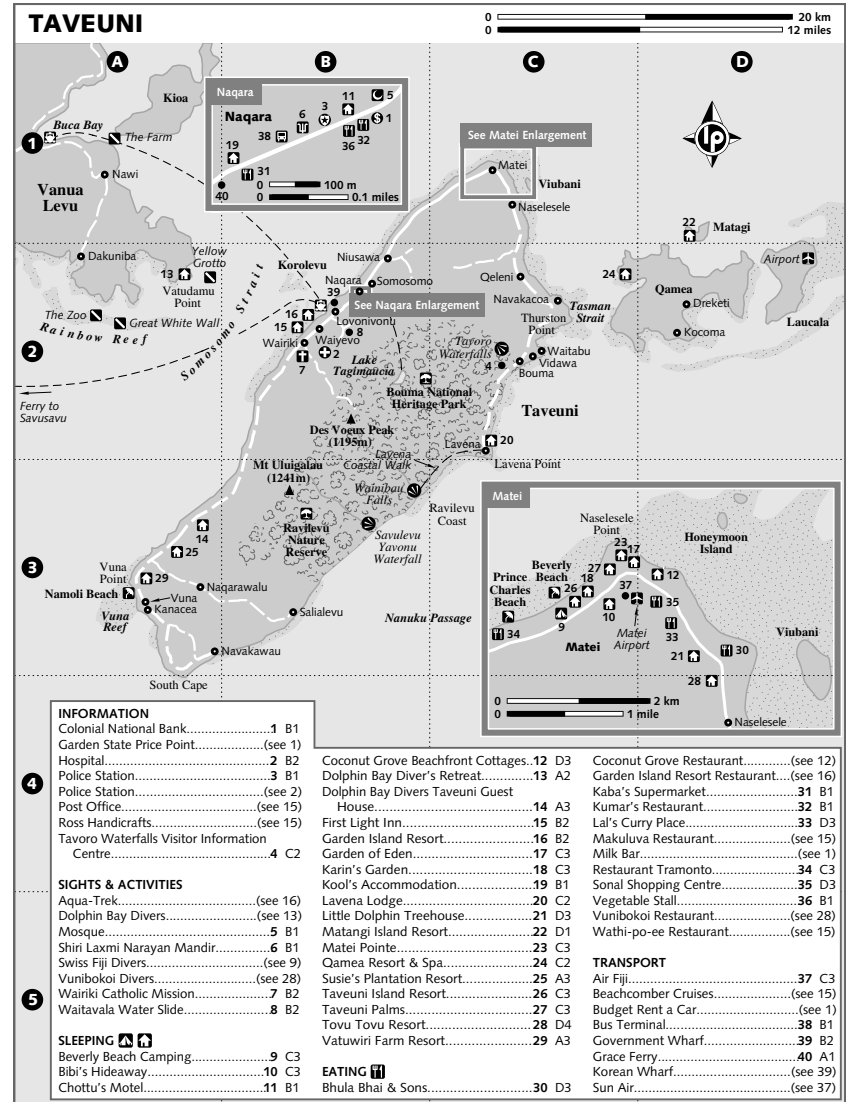
Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights between Taveuni and Viti Levu are stunning, revealing gorgeous reefs beneath. Both **Sun Air** (☎ 888 0461; Matei airport) and **Air Fiji** (☎ 888 0062; Matei airport) fly at least twice daily to and from Nadi (F\$280). Air Fiji also flies twice daily to and from Suva (F\$200) and Sun Air flies twice daily to and from Savusavu (F\$100).

The Government Wharf for large vessels, including *Spirit of Free Enterprise* (SOFE) and *Adi Savusavu*, is about 1km from Waiyevo, towards Naqara. Smaller boats depart from the Korean Wharf, a bit further north.

Consort Shipping (☎ 330 2877; fax 330 3389; Ground fl, Dominion House Arcade, Thomson St, Suva; cabin/seat F\$80/50) and **Beachcomber Cruises** (☎ 888 0036; Naqara; economy/first class F\$45/65) sail three times a



week from Suva to Savusavu (12 hours) and on to Taveuni on Wednesday and Friday. Beachcomber takes five hours (economy/first class F\$25/45) and the trip with Consort takes eight hours (from Suva cabin/seat F\$90/55). **Grace Ferry** (☎ 888 0320; Naqara) runs a daily bus/boat trip to Savusavu and Labasa (F\$20, departs 8.45am) from the Korean Wharf.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around Taveuni involves a bit of planning due to the length of time between buses. You can rent 4WDs in Naqara; however, it's far cheaper to rent a taxi for the day.

From Matei airport expect to pay about F\$18 to Waiyevo, F\$40 to Susie's Plantation

Resort and F\$50 to Vuna (about one hour) in a taxi. Most upmarket resorts provide transfers for guests.

Bus

Taveuni's bus schedule is very lax, and buses may show up an hour early or late. Be sure to double-check return bus times when you board, just to make sure there is one.

Pacific Transport (☎ 888 0278) runs buses from Wairiki to Bouma at 8.30am, 11.30am and 4.20pm. The last bus continues to Lavena, where the first bus of each morning starts out at 5.45am. On Tuesday and Thursday all buses go as far as Lavena. On Sunday there is one bus at 3.30pm from Wairiki to Lavena and one from Lavena to Wairiki at 6.45am.

From Naqara, buses run to Navakawau at 9am, 11.30am and 4.45pm Monday to Saturday. There is only one bus on Sunday. From Matei, buses run to Wairiki at 11.30am Monday to Saturday, with additional services during school term times.

Car

Budget Rent a Car (☎ 888 0291; gardenstate@connect.com.fj; Garden State Price Point; Naqara) has 4WDs for F\$125 to F\$185 per day.

Taxi

Taxis are readily available in the Matei and Waiyevo areas – it may be wise to book ahead on Sunday. Hiring a taxi for a day to tour the island should cost under F\$120; try **Nand Lal** (☎ 888 0705). For destinations such as Lavena you can go by bus and return by taxi, but you must arrange this before you go.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Taveuni is world-renowned among divers. The Somosomo Strait reveals a gazillion fish, sharks, turtles, fantastic coral and, in November, pilot whales. Sites include the infamous 32km-long Rainbow Reef, the Great White Wall, the Zoo and Vuna Reef. Water clarity is reduced in January and February due to plankton blooms and northerly winds from the equator.

There are numerous dive operations in Waiyevo, Southern Taveuni, Matei and the offshore island resorts.

There is plenty for snorkellers, too. The three small islands immediately offshore

from Naselesele Point in Matei have good snorkelling (the third is known as the local 'Honeymoon Island'). You can also snorkel happily at Prince Charles Beach or Beverly Beach.

BIRD-WATCHING

Taveuni is one of Fiji's best locations for bird-watching, with over 100 species of birds to be found. Try Des Voeux Peak at dawn for a chance to see the rare orange dove and silk-tail. Along the Lavena Coastal Walk (p206), keep your eyes peeled for parrots, fantails, flame doves, the Fiji goshawk and wattled honeyeater. Avid bird-watchers also recommend the Vidawa rainforest hike in the Bouma National Heritage Park (see p206).

WAIYEVO, SOMOSOMO & AROUND

While not the most picturesque part of the island, this area has the majority of services and can be a good base. Somosomo is the largest village on the island and headquarters for its chiefly leadership. Somosomo runs directly into Naqara, the village with the largest downtown, which constitutes a couple of gloomy supermarkets, the bank and transport links. A short taxi ride or a long dusty walk away is Waiyevo, with the hospital, police station and more ferry links. Another 2km south of Waiyevo is Wairiki village, with a general store and a beautiful old hilltop mission.

Information

The larger supermarkets and top-end resorts may accept credit cards for a fee.

Colonial National Bank (☎ 888 0433; Naqara)

Foreign exchange but no cash advances and no ATM.

Hospital (☎ 888 0444; Waiyevo)

Kaba's Supermarket (☎ 888 0088; Naqara) Offers cash advances on credit cards with 5% commission.

Police (☎ 888 0222; Waiyevo) There is also a police station in Naqara.

Post office (☎ 888 0027; Waiyevo) Beneath the First Light Inn in Waiyevo.

Ross Handicrafts (☎ 330 9872; Waiyevo) Internet access.

Swiss Fiji Divers (☎ 888 0586; Matei) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

Although the International Date Line officially doglegs Fiji, the **180-degree meridian** cuts straight through Taveuni, about a 10-minute walk south of Waiyevo. A red survey

beacon marks the spot along the water and there's an info board on the field above.

Grand **Wairiki Catholic Mission** looks out over the Somosomo Strait. Its beautiful interior has an impressive beam ceiling and reputedly French stained glass. In the presbytery, there's a painting of a famous battle in which a Catholic missionary helped Taveuni's warriors develop a strategy to defeat their Tongan attackers. It's worth attending Mass on Sunday at 7am, 9am or 11am; the congregation sits on the floor and belts out in tremendous song.

Waitavala Water Slide is a natural slide only for the brave. A bruise or two is unavoidable as you fly down the rock chutes. If there's been rain, it can be dangerous; watch a local go down before you attempt it. To get there, head north from Waiyevo, take the first right at the bus stop, take another right at the branch in the road, pass a shed and then go left down a hill. You'll see a 'waterfall' sign. This is private property so if you pass anyone, ask permission.

On a clear day the views from **Des Voeux Peak** (1195m) are fantastic – it's possible to see Lake Tagimaucia and perhaps even the Lau Group. Allow three to four hours to walk the steep and arduous 6km ascent and at least two to return. From Waiyevo, take the inland track just before Wairiki Catholic Mission. On weekdays it's sometimes possible to hitch a ride with public workers.

In the mountains above Somosomo, **Lake Tagimaucia** rests in an old volcanic crater some 823m above sea level. Fiji's national flower, the rare *tagimaucia*, grows on the lake's shores and blooms from late September to late December. The hike is overgrown and muddy, starting from Somosomo where you need to present the chief with a *sevusevu* and ask permission. Take lunch, and preferably a guide, and allow eight hours for the round trip.

Aqua-Trek Taveuni (www.aquatrek.com) at the Garden Island Resort in Waiyevo is a well-equipped dive shop with two-/six-tank dives/open water courses for F\$165/550/660.

Sleeping

Kool's Accommodation (☎ 888 0395; kools@connect.com.fj; Naqara; dm/s/d F\$15/25/35; ☑) Cheerful Kool's was undergoing renovations at the

time of writing, and adding a restaurant (F\$8/10/12 breakfast/lunch/dinner) specialising in Indo-Fijian food. Private, fan-cooled hotel rooms are en suite and you can watch satellite TV or borrow videos from Kool's library.

First Light Inn (☎ 888 0339; firstlight@connect.com.fj; Waiyevo; r with fan/air-con F\$55/60; ☑) There seems to be a theme here – this is another clean and friendly hotel with en suite rooms and satellite TV. First Light also has a kitchen for guests' use. The place tends to be devoid of staff in the evenings and Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Garden Island Resort (☎ 888 0286; www.aquatrek.com; dm/s/d/tr F\$40/166/210/250; ☑ ☑ ☑) The only resort in the area is rather unremarkable, but offers clean and comfy rooms with sea views. The pool and restaurant-bar area look out to the Somosomo Strait and Vanua Levu beyond. There is no beach, but you can swim here at high tide (but watch the current and steer clear of Korean Wharf). Transfers to and from the airport are F\$40 per person. Under 16s stay free.

Chottu's Motel (☎ 888 0233; Naqara; s/d/tr from F\$25/35/55) Basic and budget, Chottu's has big deluxe rooms with kitchens, telephones, satellite TV and hot showers. The cheapest rooms share a cold-water bathroom and a kitchen.

Eating

Garden Island Resort Restaurant (☎ 888 0286; Waiyevo; meals F\$15-35; ☑ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Tables at this pleasant eatery have a view of the pool and garden, and in the evening there's live local music. The bar is well stocked, but only for diners or guests of the resort.

Makuluva Restaurant (☎ 994 5394; Waiyevo; snacks F\$4; ☑ 8am-4pm Sun-Fri) This place looks like a fresh fish shed – and in fact it is, but there's a restaurant around the back. Order dinner before 4pm (in person or by phone).

Wathi-po-ee Restaurant (☎ 888 0382; Waiyevo; meals F\$3-5; ☑ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, breakfast & lunch Sat-Sun) The de facto restaurant for the First Light Inn serves omelette and sausage breakfasts, and oily Sino-Fijian food for lunch and dinner. A few tables are scattered beneath a corrugated roof out the back, and it's a pleasant spot for a beer.

Snack bars and supermarkets:

Kaba's Supermarket (☎ 888 0088; Naqara)

Kumar's Restaurant (☎ 888 1005; Naqara; meals F\$2-4; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner before 7pm Mon-Sat) Good curries in a shedlike atmosphere.

MH Supermarket (Somosomo)

Milk Bar (Naqara; snacks F\$3; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat) Behind the Hot Bread Kitchen sign, serves fresh chop suey, pizza and sandwiches.

SOUTHERN TAVEUNI

The road south from Waiyevo winds along the rugged coast through beautiful rainforest, *dalo* and coconut plantations to Vuna and Kanacea villages. Check out the **blow hole** on the dramatic, windswept South Cape. As the water jumps up through the volcanic rock, it creates rainbows in the air.

Activities

Diving and snorkelling on Vuna Reef and nearby Rainbow Reef are excellent. The following companies have good reputations:

Dolphin Bay Divers (☎ 992 0531, 888 0531; www.dolphinbaydivers.com) Two-tank/night/shore dives F\$130/80/45. Open water courses (F\$500) and multiday dive packages also offered. Based at the Dolphin Bay Divers Retreat (below).

Taveuni Estates Dive (☎ 888 0063; www.taveunidive.com) Two-tank dive/open water course F\$210/660.

Sleeping & Eating

Vatuwiri Farm Resort (☎ 888 0316; vatuwiriresort@connect.com.fj; d incl meals F\$340; ☎ closed mid-Oct–early Jan) One of the last working estates in the South Pacific and Taveuni's biggest cattle farm, Vatuwiri has two small cottages perched on a lawn on the water's edge. Both have gorgeous views and there's fabulous swimming and snorkelling to be done here.

Also recommended:

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Dolphin Bay Divers Retreat (☎ 992 0531, 888 0531; www.dolphinbaydivers.com; Vanaira Bay, Vanua Levu; dm/house tent/bure per person F\$20/25/45; ☎) This warm and inexpensive retreat is most easily accessed from Taveuni and offers fantastic house tents which face the sunrise and are equipped with comfortable mattresses. There's a cheerful three-bed tent dorm and an en suite tent was being constructed at the time of research. There are also adequate *bure*. A bonus is the lovingly tended wine list, which makes for boozy and companionable nights. Return transfers to Taveuni are F\$50 and daily meal plans are F\$35.

Dolphin Bay cannot be contacted (due to no mobile reception) from Buca Bay on Vanua Levu. If you turn up unannounced you'll be stranded, although the locals will put you up.

Dolphin Bay Divers Taveuni Guest House (☎ 888 0531; www.dolphinbaydivers.com; s/d F\$20/35) Large, spotless house with two double bedrooms and a shared bathroom.

Susie's Plantation Resort (☎ 888 0125; www.susiesplantationresort.com; dm/s/d/tr F\$25/70/120/150; ☎) Former plantation with gorgeous views and a range of rooms.

MATEI & AROUND

Matei is a residential area on Taveuni's northern point. Much of the freehold land has been bought by foreigners searching for a piece of tropical paradise. It's near the airport, and there are a number of places to stay, some of the island's best dining options, dive shops, a couple of beaches and nearby snorkelling.

Activities

The following diving companies service the Matei area and are recommended:

Swiss Fiji Divers (☎ 888 0586; www.swissfijidivers.com; near Beverly Beach) High-quality gear, including computer consoles and masks with underwater communication. Two-tank dive/open water course F\$185/600.

Vunibokoi Divers (☎ 888 0560; www.tovutovu.com) Dives in the Rainbow Reef. Two-tank dive/open water course F\$195/650. Based at the Tovu Tovu Resort (below).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Tovu Tovu Resort (☎ 888 0560; www.tovutovu.com; r from F\$75, f F\$125) Steeped in history, this resort is based on a subdivided copra estate and is still owned by the Petersen family who once ran the plantation. The accommodation is comfortable, with hot-water en suites and fans. There's a good restaurant (see opposite) and daily meal plans are F\$45. Tovu Tovu is a 20-minute walk southeast of Matei airport.

Beverly Beach Camping (☎ 888 0684; camping F\$10) Set on a white-sand beach beneath fantastic, huge poison-fish trees, this small and gorgeous camp has flush toilets, a shower and a sheltered area for cooking and dining. The owner sometimes brings around fresh fruit in the morning and can provide snorkelling and fishing equipment.

Bibi's Hideaway (☎ 888 0443; camping F\$15, s/d from F\$50/90, f F\$110) Cheap, relaxed and friendly, Bibi's has a variety of rooms and *bure*, all of which are clean and lovingly maintained. The newest *bure* (F\$60/70) is very good value, and Bibi has built a free emergency rainshelter *bure* for faint-hearted campers. The vibe here is gold. There's electricity in the evenings but no hot water at any time.

MIDRANGE

Karin's Garden (☎ 888 0511; www.karinsgardenfiji.com; d/tr/q F\$195/250/320) A lovingly cared for two-bedroom cottage with a kitchen, sitting room, veranda and bird's-eye view of the reef, Karin's Garden is only rented out as a single unit. The rooms are big and cosy, the owners affable and relaxed, and there is a two-night minimum stay.

Little Dolphin Treehouse (☎ 888 0130; d F\$90) Resembling a slightly precarious kind of proto-pagoda, this cute cottage has a breeze-cooled bedroom upstairs with a comfortable queen-size bed and a veranda looking out to the ocean. Downstairs is a kitchen and hot-water bathroom. Great for self-caterers but no children.

Matei Pointe (☎ 888 0422; www.taveuniresort.com; d per day/week F\$260/1490, f per day/week F\$460/2980; ☎ ☎) There are lovely views, gardens and beach at the closest accommodation to the airport. The spacious new Bula House has three bedrooms all with en suite, steps to a pretty pocket of white sand, great views from a big deck, washing machine and telephone. Walk-in rates can be a bargain.

Also recommended:

Coconut Grove Beachfront Cottages (☎ 888 0328; www.coconutgrovefiji.com; r F\$270-330) Small and pretty resort with three cottages and a good restaurant.

Garden of Eden (☎ 888 2344; r F\$200; ☎) Huge, two-bedroom timber home.

TOP END

Taveuni Palms (☎ 888 0032; www.taveunipalmsfiji.com; d F\$1580; ☎ ☎ ☎) Breathtakingly beautiful and

right on the beach, Taveuni Palms boasts two secluded villas, each with a private beach, swimming pool, state-of-the-art entertainment system and personal chef, who'll cook a five-course meal for you every night. If you're nuts, you can make use of the sparkly kitchens. One villa has an en suite sleep-out for kids, and the resort provides a free nanny. Five-night minimum stay.

Taveuni Island Resort (☎ 888 0441; www.taveuniislandresort.com; r incl meals F\$1500; ☎ ☎) A small, opulent resort on a hill overlooking the beach, all polished wood and wicker, with absolutely gorgeous views. The very private *bure* are rock and wood and some have Taveuni's (if not Fiji's) biggest bathrooms. This is a honeymooners' haven with gourmet meals and no children under 15.

Eating

Vunibokoi Restaurant (☎ 888 0560; mains F\$18; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Tovu Tovu Resort (see opposite) has a friendly, comfortable restaurant with an outdoor deck overlooking Viubani Island. The food is fabulously tasty and on Friday there's a popular buffet and music night (F\$20); it's worth popping in just to have a drink.

Lal's Curry Place (☎ 888 0705; meals F\$12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) You know the garam marsala is authentic here because Mrs Lal dries the ingredients on the front lawn. She dishes up big portions of robust curries with roti, rice and dahl. Her husband, Nand, is a knowledgeable, reliable taxi driver.

Coconut Grove Restaurant (☎ 888 0328; meals F\$15-40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The restaurant attached to the Coconut Grove Beachfront Cottages (see left) serves excellent vegetarian dishes, homemade pasta, salads, fish and delicious desserts. The food is fresh and fine and meals are served on the veranda with water views. Order before 4pm.

Restaurant Tramonto (☎ 888 2224; meals F\$18-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) Pizza is the speciality at this waterfront restaurant, but other well-prepared dishes are served if ingredients are available (staff can tell you if you call ahead). On Sunday there's a buffet dinner (F\$25) and on Wednesday a barbecue (F\$20); reservations required.

Local supermarkets include **Bhula Bhai & Sons** (☎ 888 0462) and **Sonal Shopping Centre** (☎ 888 0431).

EASTERN TAVEUNI

Eastern Taveuni's beautiful wild coast and lush rainforest are in good hands, with local landowners rejecting logging in favour of ecotourism. The venture is going fabulously, and the region is a magnet for nature lovers.

Bouma National Heritage Park

This **national park** (admission F\$8) protects over 80% of Taveuni's total area, covering about 150sq km of coastal forest and rainforest. Within are several kilometres of bush walks, the three beautiful **Tavoro Waterfalls** and natural swimming pools. The walking track begins opposite the reception *bure*, south of the river in Bouma.

The first waterfall is only 10 minutes' walk along a flat path and is a great place for a dip. The second waterfall, a further 30 or 40 minutes along, is smaller but also has a good swimming pool. The track is steep in places, with a river crossing, but has steps, handrails and lookout spots to rest. The 30-minute hike to the third and smallest fall is less well maintained and often muddy. It has a great swimming pool and, if you bring your snorkelling gear, you'll be able to see the hundreds of prawns in the water.

If you are keen walker, try the **Vidawa rainforest hike** (☎ 888 0390; adult/child F\$60/40, maximum 8 people; ☹ Mon-Sat), a full-day guided walk taking in historic fortified village sites, rainforest and Tavoro Waterfalls. The trip includes hotel transfers, lunch and park fees. Book in advance through the Tavoro Waterfalls **visitor information centre** (☎ 888 0390; camping F\$10 per person; meals F\$5-10; ☹ 9am-4pm), which has simple camping facilities and serves meals in a lovely spot. There's a kitchen, toilets, an open shower for campers and a covered eating area, or you can picnic by the river. The generator kicks in for the evening. Staff will let you store your bags here while you hike up to the falls.

Waitabu Marine Park

This area offers excellent snorkelling off a white-sand beach. You can only visit the park with a guide. The village of Waitabu has set up a half-day **tour** (☎ 888 0451; per person F\$35/40 for 1/4 or more), including a guided snorkel, *bilibili* ride, morning and afternoon tea in the village. There's also a

backpackers' tour with guided snorkelling and boat transfers (F\$20 per person).

Lavena Coastal Walk

The 5km Lavena Coastal Walk is well worth the effort. The trail follows the forest edge along the beach, passes peaceful villages and then climbs up through the tropical rainforest to a gushing waterfall. There's some good snorkelling and kayaking here, and Lavena Point is good for swimming.

The path is clearly marked and well maintained. To see and reach the falls at the end of the trail, you have to walk over rocks and swim a short distance through two deep pools. If you're visiting in the rainy season it can be difficult, if not dangerous, to reach the falls. Ask at Lavena Lodge (see below) for current conditions. Violent flash floods can occur at any time of year (even if it hasn't been raining), and you should stay to the left of the pool where you can make an easier getaway.

The park is managed through Lavena Lodge. Park entrance is F\$5 or F\$15 with a guide. Kayaks can be hired for F\$40 per day and guided kayak tours are available.

Run by friendly, informative staff, **Lavena Lodge** (☎ 888 0116; tw per person F\$15) has basic, clean rooms, a shared kitchen and bathroom. There's electricity in the evening and a maximum of eight people. Next to a beach, this is a great place to relax after a hard day's hike.

Meals are available from the lodge (F\$7/10 breakfast/lunch or dinner). There's a tiny shop in the village, but if you're planning to cook, bring your own supplies.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

Matangi

area 1 sq km

Stunning Matangi is 10km off Taveuni's coast, with steep rainforest rising 130m.

The deluxe *bure* at **Matangi Island Resort** (☎ 888 0260; www.matangiisland.com; s/d/tr incl meals from F\$470/800/970, child 2-11 F\$150; ☹) are roomy enough to turn cartwheels in and each is surrounded by a neat tropical garden. The beach is lovely, and the 'tree-houses' (F\$1360) are perched 5m up in the tree canopy. Rates include most activities and Taveuni transfers. Matangi boasts 30 dive spots within 10 to 30 minutes of the island; a two-tank dive is F\$230.

Qamea

area 34 sq km

Only 2.5km east from Taveuni, Qamea is a green and hilly island skirted by bays with white-sand beaches. The island is rich in birdlife and notable for the *lairi*, the annual migration of land crabs.

Qamea Resort & Spa (☎ 888 0220; www.qamea.com; d/tr incl meals from F\$1250/1540; ☹) has magnificently thatched *bure* on a beautiful white-sand beach. There's excellent snorkelling, windsurfing, sailing, outrigger canoeing, nature walks, village visits, fishing trips and a spa offering 55 different treatments. Two-tank dives/open water courses cost F\$360/950. Rates include transfers to and from Taveuni. No children under 16.

KADAVU

pop 12,000 / area 450 sq km

About 100km south of Viti Levu, this untamed group of islands forms a hilly and verdant backdrop against the empty sea. The absence of roads and infrastructure helps to maintain a prehistoric façade, and Kadavu's 72 villages still rely largely on subsistence agriculture. Tourism is expanding at a slow creep, enough to beckon travellers without impacting too greatly on the existing culture.

The magnificent and sizeable Astrolabe Reef is Kadavu's main lure. Cutting a vivid swathe around the group's base, it rewards visitors with some of the finest diving in the Pacific. But the interior is just as colourful and the lush rainforests, especially on the eastern side, are home to a wide variety of birdlife, including the celebrated Kadavu musk parrot.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The ferry trip to Kadavu from Suva can be rough and the timetable is erratic. Flying is a quicker and safer option. The small boats used for transfers to and from the airstrip often don't have life jackets or radios.

ACTIVITIES

The mountains have rainforest, numerous waterfalls and **hiking** trails. Ask locals about current conditions before setting out. The isolated villagers are very traditional, so when visiting a village, ask to speak to the

turaga-ni-koro first, remove your hat and don't carry things on your shoulders.

Kadavu has excellent **diving**, with the famous Astrolabe Reef skirting the eastern side of the group. Expect to see brilliantly coloured corals, vertical drop-offs and a wonderful array of marine life. Unfortunately, the weather often dictates which sites are available, as visibility can range from 15m to 70m. Most resorts have dive outfits.

The best **surfing** in Kadavu is found around Cape Washington, at the southernmost end of Kadavu.

Tamarillo Sea Kayaking (☎ 04-239 9885; www.tamarillo.co.nz/index.html; per person F\$2600; ☹ May-Sep) offers interesting seven-day kayak tours around Kadavu with meals and accommodation in budget resorts and villages. All the resorts have two-person ocean kayaks for hire.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Around

Air Fiji (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj; 185 Victoria Pde, Suva) has daily flights from Suva to Kadavu (F\$260, 30 minutes). **Sun Air** (☎ 0800 672 5725, 572 3016; www.fiji.to) has daily flights to and from Nadi (F\$330, 45 minutes). There is talk of another airport being constructed at the eastern end of Kadavu, which would reduce transfer times to nearby resorts considerably.

Kadavu Shipping (☎ 331 1766, 339 5000, 339 5788) in Suva operates the largely irregular and unreliable MV *Bulou-ni-Ceva* between Suva and Kadavu (F\$45 one way). It's mostly for cargo and local use, can take anything from four hours to two days and varies from bearable to terrible, depending on the weather.

Kadavu's few roads are restricted to the Vanisea area, except for one rough, unsealed road to Nabukelevu-i-Ra around the southern end of Kadavu. Small boats are the group's principal mode of transport. Each resort has its own boat and will pick up guests from Vanisea airstrip; make sure you make arrangements in advance.

SLEEPING

Papageno Eco-Resort (☎ 330 3355; www.papagenoecoresort.com; s incl meals from F\$280, d incl meals F\$400-600; ☹) Ecologically friendly and embedded in a thick tropical garden, Papageno

enough for you to stay in. Ask where the best place to pitch your tent is and provide a gift or *sevusevu*.

Most accommodation in Fiji is mid-range; options include hotels, motels and resorts ranging from F\$80 to F\$150 for one person and F\$90 to F\$170 for two. Guests can expect bathrooms, TVs and bar fridges in hotels, and many lodges and resorts offer self-contained units. Top-end options generally include five-star chains and resorts, with prices ranging from F\$160 to F\$2000 per room.

The term 'resort' is used very loosely in Fiji and can refer to any accommodation near the sea, ranging from backpacker-style to pure luxury.

All accommodation prices quoted in this chapter are inclusive of Fiji's 12.5% sales tax.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Fiji offers some spectacular snorkelling. Among the best spots are Nananu-i-Ra off Viti Levu's northern coast, as well as islands in the Mamanuca and Yasawa Groups. Reefs are often very close to the coast, but in many places you can only swim at high tide and channels can be dangerous.

This is also a diver's Mecca with magnificent sites and dive resorts for every budget (see p70). Prices range from around F\$140 to F\$190 for a two-tank dive and F\$400 to F\$650 for a PADI open water certification course.

Companies with good equipment, instructors and reputations include **AquaBlue** (☎ 672 6111; www.aquabluefiji.com) in Nadi, **Subsurface Fiji** (☎ 666 6738; www.subsurfacefiji.com) in the Mamanucas and **Westside Watersports** (☎ 666 1462, 998 862; westside@divefiji.com) in the Yasawas.

Hiking

Viti Levu and Taveuni are the best islands for hiking. Suva's Colo-i-Suva Forest Park and Taveuni's Lavena Coastal Walk have marked trails that don't require guides or permission. Hiking hot spots in the Viti Levu Highlands include Mt Tomanivi and Koroyanitu National Heritage Park. There are also some excellent trails on Waya in the Yasawas.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Fiji Times* is the national daily newspaper. *Fiji Magic* (www.fijilive.com/fijimagic) and *Fiji Holidays* are free monthly publications with details and prices of accommodation, restaurants, activities and tours.
- The government-sponsored Fiji Broadcasting Commission has stations in English (Radio Fiji 3 and 104FM), Fijian (Radio Fiji 1) and Fiji-Hindi (Radio Fiji 2 and 98FM). Bula 100 plays an eclectic mix of pop, rock, reggae, dance, folk, country and local music. Fiji has one television station and Sky satellite TV in some resorts and bars.
- The video and DVD systems used in Fiji are PAL, which is the same as Australia, NZ, Europe, the UK and most of Asia and the Pacific.
- Electricity is supplied at 240V, 50Hz AC. Outlets use flat two- or three-pin plugs like those in Australia and NZ.
- Fiji follows the metric system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Kayaking & Rafting

Sea-kayaking tours are available around Nananu-i-Ra (see p175) and are offered by **Tamarillo Sea Kayaking** (☎ 04-239 9885; www.tamarillo.co.nz/index.html) off Kadavu. Based at Pacific Harbour, **Rivers Fiji** (☎ 345 0147; www.riversfiji.com) offers exciting river-rafting and kayaking trips to the superb Namosi Highlands.

Surfing

Surfing usually requires boat trips as the majority of breaks are on offshore reefs. The best spots are in barrier-reef passages along southern Viti Levu (Frigate's Passage) and in the southern Mamanucas (Malolo and Wilkes Passages). These should only be tackled by experienced surfers. There are also breaks at Kadavu and a few places along Viti Levu's Coral Coast. The dry season (May to October) is the best time to surf due to low pressures bringing in big waves.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses open weekdays from 8am to 5pm, and some from 8am to 1pm on Saturday. Government offices are open from 8am to 4.30pm weekdays (to 4pm on Friday). Many places close for lunch from 1pm to 2pm and practically nothing happens on Sunday. Restaurants generally open for lunch (11am to 2pm) and dinner (6pm to 9pm) from Monday to Saturday, as well as dinner on Sunday.

CHILDREN

Fiji is a major family destination and very child-friendly. Many resorts cater specifically for children, with baby-sitting, cots and high chairs, organised activities and children's pools. Some resorts have lots of levels and sand paths, however, which can make using prams and strollers difficult.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Fijian Embassies & Consulates

Fiji has diplomatic representation in the following countries.

Australia (☎ 02-6260 5115; fhc@cyberone.com.au)

Canada (☎ 03-233 9252; fax 594 8705)

Japan (☎ 03-3587 2038; www.fijiembassy.jp)

New Zealand (☎ 04-473 5401; fax 499 1011)

UK (☎ 020-7584 3661; www.fijihighcommission.org.uk)

USA (☎ 202-337 8320; www.fijiembassy.org)

Embassies & Consulates in Fiji

Australia (☎ 338 2211; fax 338 2065; 37 Princes Rd, Tamavua, Suva)

Canada (Consulate; ☎ /fax 672 1936; Nadi airport)

France (☎ 331 2233; fax 330 1894; 7th fl, Dominion House, Thomson St, Suva)

Germany (Consulate; ☎ 331 2633; fax 330 2416; 80-82 Harris Rd, Suva)

Japan (☎ 330 2122; fax 330 1452; 2nd fl, Dominion House, Thomson St, Suva)

Korea (☎ 330 0977; fax 330 8059; 8th fl, Vanua House, Victoria Pde, Suva)

Nauru (☎ 331 3566; fax 330 2861; 7th fl, Ratu Sukuna House, Suva)

Netherlands (Consulate; ☎ 330 1499; fax 330 1618; Cromptons Solicitors, 1st fl, Victoria Arcade, Victoria Pde, Suva)

New Zealand (☎ 331 1422; fax 330 0842; 10th fl, Reserve Bank Bldg, Pratt St, Suva)

Tuvalu (☎ 330 1355; fax 330 8479; 16 Gorrie St, Suva)

UK (High Commission; ☎ 322 9100; fax 330 1406; Victoria House, 47 Gladstone Rd, Suva)

USA (☎ 331 4466; fax 330 0081; 31 Loftus St, Suva)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p289 for regional public holidays.

February/March

Hindu Holi (Festival of Colours) People squirt coloured water at each other; best seen in Lautoka.

March/April

Ram Naumi (Birth of Lord Rama) Hindu religious festival in Suva Bay. Worshippers wade into the water and throw flowers.

July

Bula Festival One of Fiji's biggest festivals – held in Nadi with rides, music, shows and the crowning of 'Miss Bula'.

August

Hibiscus Festival Held in Suva, with lots of floats.

Fiji Ocean Swim (www.manafiji.com/swim2.htm)

Competitors race a 3km course of ocean at Mana Island in this international swim event.

Hindu Ritual Fire Walking Performed by southern Indians in many temples.

September

Sugar Festival Lautoka's streets come alive with parades and fun fairs.

Fiji Regatta Week (www.musketcovefiji.com) Annual, international regatta held at Muscat Cove in the Mamanucas.

October/November

Diwali Festival (Festival of Lights) Hindus worship Lakshmi, houses are decorated, business is settled, and candles and lanterns are set on doorsteps to light the way of the god.

Ram Leela (Play of Rama) Hindus celebrate through theatrical performances the life of god-king Rama and his return from exile.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are fairly prolific in Suva, Lautoka and Nadi. Broadband access costs around 6c to 10c per minute. Access outside these cities is more limited and pricier (10c to 20c per minute).

Wireless Internet access is a recent phenomenon to Fiji thanks to **Unwired Fiji** (☎ 327 5040; www.unwired.com.fj); you'll need to purchase a special modem from them.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Fiji Government (www.fiji.gov.fj) Contains press releases, news and immigration updates.

Fiji Times (www.fijitimes.com.fj) Fiji's daily newspaper online.

Fiji Village (www.fijivillage.com) Geared for overseas Fijians, this site is updated with daily news and has excellent links to local events.

Fiji Visitors Bureau (www.bulafiji.com) Fiji's official tourist site, offering information on accommodation, activities and getting around, with links and an email directory.

Fijilive (www.fijilive.com) Live updates on Fijian news.

MAPS

The best place to buy maps of the Fiji islands is the Map Shop in Suva. It sells big (1:50,000), detailed topographic maps of each island or island group, as well as maps of Suva. The *Fiji Travel Map* by Hema is the most useful map for tourists.

MONEY ATMs

ATMs are common in urban areas and most accept the main international debit cards, including Cirrus and Maestro, as well as Visa and MasterCard.

Currency

The local currency is the Fijian dollar (F\$), which is fairly stable relative to the Australian and NZ dollars. Exchange rates are given in the following table.

Country	Unit	Fijian dollar
Australia	A\$1	F\$1.30
Canada	C\$1	F\$1.55
CFP zone	100 CFP	F\$1.82
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	F\$3.34
euro zone	€1	F\$2.17
Japan	¥100	F\$1.52
NZ	NZ\$1	F\$1.09
Samoa	ST1	60c
Solomon Islands	S\$1	24c
Tonga	T\$1	86c
UK	£1	F\$3.14
USA	US\$1	F\$1.72
Vanuatu	100Vt	F\$1.58

Taxes

All prices quoted in this chapter are inclusive of VAT (value added tax), a 12.5% sales tax on goods and services.

Tipping

While tipping is not expected in Fiji, many resorts have a 'Staff Christmas Fund' jar for tips. Indigenous Fijians generally don't like to bargain but bargaining is customary in

HOW MUCH?

- **Taxi in Nadi or Suva:** F\$4-10
- **Snorkel hire:** F\$5-10
- **Local bus ride:** 65c
- **Coffee:** F\$2
- **Cocktail:** F\$6

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** F\$1.50
- **1L bottled water:** F\$1.50
- **Stubbie of Fiji Bitter:** F\$4
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** F\$20
- **Samosa:** 50c

most Indo-Fijian stores. Many Indo-Fijian shop owners and taxi drivers consider it bad luck to lose their first customer of the day; you can expect an especially hard sales pitch early in the morning as well as some good deals.

TELEPHONE

The international telephone code for Fiji is 679. There are no area codes.

Mobile Phones

Vodafone (www.vodafone.com.fj) is the only mobile phone company in Fiji. It operates a GSM digital service and has roaming agreements with Vodafone in Australia, NZ and the UK, as well as Optus in Australia.

Mobile phones and simcards can be purchased from **Vodafone** (Suva ☎ 331 4170; Post Fiji Bldg, Thomson St; Nadi ☎ 670 3666; Shop 153, Moraji Kalidas Bldg, Main St). Alternatively, mobile phones can be rented from some car-rental agencies.

Phonecards

Public telephones require a phonecard, available from post offices, some pharmacies and newsagents. They come in denominations of F\$3, F\$5, F\$10, F\$20 and F\$50. You'll find public phones outside the post office but they're generally just for decoration and are rarely functioning. You'll also find them at resorts and around town.

For international calls, the cheapest calling cards are 'Call the World for Cheap' cards, available from shops in urban centres.

TIME

Fiji is 12 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon in Suva it's midnight the previous day in London, 5pm the previous day in Los Angeles, noon the same day in Auckland and 10am the same day in Sydney.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN FIJI

The head office of the **Fiji Visitors Bureau** (☎ 672 2433; www.bulafiji.com; Suite 107, Colonial Plaza, Namaka; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri) is in Nadi. There is also an office in Suva (☎ 330 4177; www.spto.org; 3rd fl, Dolphin Plaza, cnr Loftus St & Victoria Pde, Suva; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri).

The **South Pacific Tourism Organisation** (☎ 330 4177; www.spto.org; 3rd fl, Dolphin Plaza, cnr Loftus St & Victoria Pde, Suva; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is another useful source of information.

VISAS

A free tourist visa for four months is granted on arrival to citizens of more than 100 countries, including most countries belonging to the British Commonwealth, North America, much of South America and Western Europe, India, Israel, Japan and South Korea. Check www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/fiji_faqs.shtml for a full list. You'll need to have an onward ticket and a passport valid for at least three months longer than your intended stay.

Nationalities from countries excluded from this list will have to apply for visas through a Fijian embassy prior to arrival.

Tourist visas can be extended for up to six months by applying through the Department of Immigration. You'll need to show an onward ticket, proof of sufficient funds and your passport must be valid for three months after your proposed departure. Apply at the **Immigration Department** (☎ 331 2672; Government Bldg, Suva).

TRANSPORT IN FIJI

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Most international flights to Fiji arrive at Nadi International Airport, with a few flights landing at Nausori International Airport near Suva.

As you enter the arrivals area in Nadi, you will be greeted by serenading guitar and a sea of smiling faces, mostly representatives

DEPARTURE TAX

Fijian departure tax is incorporated into your ticket, so there is no need to pay it at the airport.

of local accommodation and the many travel agencies.

Nausori, 23km northeast of downtown Suva, is Fiji's second airport. Air Fiji has flights to Tuvalu, and Air Pacific and Qantas have direct flights to and from Sydney. Otherwise the airport is mostly used for domestic purposes.

The main carriers servicing Fiji are Air Pacific, Qantas, Air New Zealand, Korean Air and United Airlines. See p837 for details of air passes that include Fiji.

Fares from Sydney or Brisbane are typically A\$550/800 return low/high season. From Auckland to Fiji (three hours) costs about NZ\$460/730 low/high season. Fares from the USA vary greatly in price, depending on season and ticket restrictions. Los Angeles-Nadi with Air New Zealand is about US\$920/1300 low/high season. A return ticket from London to Nadi costs about £850/1100 low/high season.

The following international airlines fly to and from Fiji:

Air Fiji (☎ 672 2521, 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj/index.cfm)

Air Nauru (☎ 672 2795, 331 2377/3731; www.airnauru.com.au)

Air New Zealand (☎ 331 3100; www.airnz.co.nz)

Air Pacific (☎ 672 0888, 330 4388; www.airpacific.com.fj)

Air Vanuatu (☎ 672 2521, 331 3666/3055; www.airvanuatu.com)

Aircalin (☎ 672 2145; www.aircalin.nc)

Freedom Air (☎ 0800 600 500; www.freedomair.co.nz)

Korean Air (☎ 672 1043; www.koreanair.com.au)

Pacific Blue (www.flypacificblue.com)

Qantas Airways (☎ 672 2880, 331 3888/1833; www.qantas.com.au)

Royal Tongan Airlines (☎ 672 4355; rtafiji@connect.com.fj)

Solomon Airlines (☎ 672 2831; www.solomonairlines.com.au)

United Airlines (☎ 61 131 777; www.united.com)

Sea

Travelling to Fiji by sea is difficult unless you're on a cruise ship or yacht.

Yachts need to head for the designated ports of entry at Suva, Lautoka, Levuka or Savusavu, to clear customs, immigration and quarantine. Present a certificate of clearance from the previous port of call, a crew list and passports.

Yachties need to apply to the **Ministry for Fijian Affairs** (www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/m_fijian_affairs.shtml) for special written authorisation to visit the outer islands. Before departing, you'll again need to complete clearance formalities (within 24 hours), providing inbound clearance papers, your vessel's details and your next port of call. Customs must be cleared before immigration, and you must have paid all port dues and health fees.

GETTING AROUND

By using local buses, carriers and ferries, you can get around Fiji's main islands relatively cheaply and easily. If you'd like more comfort, or are short on time, you can use air-conditioned express buses, rental vehicles, charter boats and small planes.

Air

AIRLINES IN FIJI

Air Fiji and Sun Air have regular inter-island flights by light plane. Most Air Fiji services operate out of Nausori, while Sun Air is based in Nadi. Sun Air often transports passengers' luggage in a separate plane, and arriving before or after your possessions is a common occurrence. See p147 for sample fares. You can sometimes get a discount if you book directly through the airline offices in Suva. Air Pacific was planning to re-enter the domestic market, with a plan to fly to Taveuni, Savusavu and other northern destinations.

Air Fiji (☎ 331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) Operates seven flights daily from Suva to Nadi; five to Labasa; two to Levuka, Savusavu and Taveuni; and one to Kadavu. It also flies twice weekly from Suva to Rotuma, Lakeba and Vanua Balavu, and once weekly to Moala, Gau and Koro. From Nadi, there are four flights daily to Savusavu, two to Taveuni and one to Labasa.

Sun Air (☎ 0800 672 5725, 572 3016; www.fiji.to) Has two flights daily from Nadi to Labasa and Savusavu; three to Taveuni; four to Malololailai and Mana; and one to Suva and Kadavu. It also has two flights daily between Suva and Labasa, and between Savusavu and Taveuni.

See p153 for information about charter services and joy flights that can be used as island transfers from Nadi.

AIR PASSES

Air Fiji's 30-day Air Pass is US\$270. It's sold only outside Fiji together with an international air fare. The pass includes four flights, but you can add extra legs for F\$100 per sector. It's best to book your seats, as the small planes often fill up quickly. Children under 12 get a 25% discount and infants are charged 10%. There is a F\$100 predeparture cancellation fee, and reimbursement is minimal once in Fiji. If you change your mind, it will cost F\$100 to reissue your ticket.

Bicycle

Fiji's larger islands have good potential for cycling, although some areas are extremely hilly and rugged and Fijian drivers can be rather unaware of cyclists. The best time to bike is in the 'drier' season and good spots include the Coral Coast on Viti Levu, the unsealed Hibiscus Hwy on Vanua Levu and Ovalau's coastal road. Bicycles can be hired on the Coral Coast, at Nadi and Ovalau and cost around F\$25 to F\$40 per day; always test the brakes and gears beforehand. Wacking Stick Adventure Tours near Nadi runs mountain-bike tours (see p151).

There seems to be no official road rule regarding cyclists, so the rule of thumb should be to assume that all vehicles have right of way.

Boat

With the exception of the upmarket resort islands, often the only means of transport to and between islands is by small local boats, especially for the backpacker resorts. Life jackets are rarely provided; if the weather looks ominous or the boat is overcrowded, seriously consider postponing the trip!

Inter-island trips for sightseeing, catamaran transfers and sail cruises are available in the Mamanuca and Yasawa Groups.

FERRY

Regular ferry services link Viti Levu to Vanua Levu and Taveuni, and also Viti Levu to Ovalau. Irregular boats also take passengers from Suva to the Lau Group, Rotuma and Kadavu. Ferry timetables are notorious for changing frequently and there is often a long wait at stopovers. Toilets can become filthy, so take your own toilet paper.

Note that most car-rental agencies won't let you take their car on board.

Nadi-Mamanucas

South Sea Cruises (☎ 675 0500; www.ssc.com.fj; Port Denarau, Nadi) has a catamaran shuttling daily between Denarau Marina and the Mamanuca islands. See p180 for more information.

Nadi-Yasawas

Awesome Adventures (☎ 675 0499; www.awesomefiji.com), which also operates South Sea Cruises, runs a large yellow catamaran called the *Yasawa Flyer* to all the of the Yasawa Group islands, plus several of the Mamanuca islands daily. See p184 for more information.

Suva-Savusavu-Taveuni

Consort Shipping (☎ 330 2877; fax 330 3389; Ground fl, Dominion House Arcade, Thomson St, Suva; cabin/seat F\$80/50) and **Beachcomber Cruises** (Lautoka ☎ 666 1500; fax 666 4496; economy/first class F\$45/65; Savusavu ☎ 885 0266; Taveuni ☎ 888 0036) sail three times a week from Suva to Savusavu (12 hours); see p194 for more details and p200 for details of onward services to Taveuni.

Grace Ferry (Labasa Gulam Nabi & Sons; ☎ 881 1152; Nasekula Rd; Savusavu Country Kitchen; ☎ 927 1372) has a bus/boat trip from Taveuni to Savusavu and Labasa (F\$20), departing at 8.45am from the Korean Wharf.

Lautoka-Ellington Wharf-

Nabouwalu-Labasa

Patterson Brothers Shipping (Suva ☎ 331 5644; fax 330 1652; Suites 1 & 2, Epworth Arcade, Nina St; Labasa ☎ 881 2444; Nasekula Rd; Lautoka ☎ 666 1173; 15 Tukani St; Levuka ☎ 344 0125; Beach St) operates a bus from Lautoka to Ellington Wharf (3½ hours), connecting with the *Ashika* ferry to Nabouwalu (3¾ hours) on Vanua Levu and then another bus trip to Labasa (four hours).

Suva-Natovi-Nabouwalu-Labasa

Patterson Brothers Shipping travels this route (F\$45, 10 hours) on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Suva-Natovi-Buresala-Levuka

Patterson Brothers Shipping operates a daily service (F\$24), which involves a bus ride (1½ hours) from Suva (Western Bus Terminal, Rodwell Rd) to Natovi Landing, followed by a ferry to Buresala Landing (one hour) and another bus to Levuka (one hour). Buses depart Suva at 2pm and Labasa at 5am.

Suva-Kadavu

Kadavu Shipping (☎ 331 1766, 339 5000, 339 5788; Rona St, Walu Bay, Suva) has irregular passenger services on the MV *Bulou-ni-Ceva* (F\$45 one way). The service can take anything from four hours to two days, depending on the weather.

Suva-Rotuma

Western Shipping (☎ 331 4467; Naryan Jetty, Suva) operates the *Cagi Mai Ba* to Rotuma (deck/cabin F\$130/150, 36 hours). Call for departure times and dates.

Suva-Lau Group

Saliabasaga Shipping (☎ 330 3403; Walu Bay, Suva) runs fortnightly trips to the Lau Group aboard the MV *Tunatuki*. One-way fares to Vanua Balavu are F\$90/120 for a deck/cabin, including meals; the trip takes around a week.

Infrequent boats to the Southern Lau Group are operated by **Kabua Development Corporation** (☎ 330 2258; fax 332 0251; Muaiwalu Complex, Old Millers Wharf, Rona St, Walu Bay, Suva) and **Khans Shipping** (☎ /fax 330 8786; Muaiwalu Complex, Rona St, Walu Bay, Suva).

YACHT

Yachting is a great way to explore the Fiji archipelago. It is possible to charter boats or hitch a ride on cruising vessels. See p213 for information on documentation and immigration requirements.

Bus

Catching a local bus on Fiji's larger islands is an inexpensive and fun way of getting around. While they can be fairly noisy and smoky they are perfect for the tropics, with unglazed windows and pull-down tarpaulins for when it rains. There are bus stops but you can often just hail buses, especially in rural areas.

Sunbeam Transport and Pacific Transport are the main carriers on Viti Levu; the latter also operates services on Taveuni (see p202 for details). Local companies operate buses on Vanua Levu; see p198 for services in Savusavu and p200 for Labasa.

Reservations are not necessary for local buses. If you are on a tight schedule or have an appointment, it may be a good idea to buy your ticket in advance, especially for coach trips over longer distances (eg Suva to Nadi).

Pacific Transport and Sunbeam issue timetables from their offices in Lautoka.

Bus companies in Fiji:

Coral Sun Fiji (☎ 672 3105) Comfortable, air-conditioned coaches between Nadi and the Holiday Inn in Suva (F\$20, four hours, once daily), stopping at resorts on the Coral Coast.

Pacific Transport Limited (☎ in Nadi 670 0044, in Lautoka 666 0499, in Sigatoka 650 0088, in Suva 330 4366) About six express buses daily between Lautoka and Suva (F\$12.50, five/six hours for regular/express) via the Coral Coast. Generally OK to turn up at the bus station, but you can book in advance for an extra 50c.

Sunbeam Transport Limited (☎ in Lautoka 666 2822, in Suva 338 2122/2704, in Nadi 927 2121) Around four Lautoka–Suva express services daily via the Queens Rd (F\$12, five hours). Also around six services daily via the Kings Rd.

United Touring Fiji (☎ 672 2811; www.atspacific.com/fiji; Nadi airport) Two daily air-conditioned services between Nadi and Suva (F\$25, 4½ hours, 7.30am and 1pm), dropping off at Coral Coast resorts along the way. Nadi–Korolevu is F\$18.

Car & Motorcycle

Ninety percent of Fiji's 5100km of roads are on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu (about one-fifth are sealed). Both islands are fun to explore by car.

DRIVING LICENCE

If you hold a current driving licence from an English-speaking country, you are entitled to drive in Fiji. Otherwise, you will need an international driving permit, which should be obtained in your home country before travelling.

HIRE

Rental cars are relatively expensive in Fiji. Despite this, it is a good way to explore the larger islands, especially if you can split the cost with others. The shorter the hire period, the higher the rate; a week or more with an international company will cost around F\$80 per day, excluding tax, but the same car can cost twice as much for one or two days' hire. It's usual to pay a deposit by credit card. If you don't have one, you'll need to leave a hefty cash bond. Generally, the larger, well-known companies have better cars and support, but are more expensive.

A valid overseas or international driving licence is required. The minimum age requirement is 21, or in some cases 25.

Avis Rent a Car (www.avis.com; ☎ Nadi airport 672 2233, Nausori airport 347 8963, in Suva 331 3833)

Budget Rent a Car (www.budget.com.fj; ☎ in Labasa 881 1999, Nadi airport 672 2636, Nausori airport 347 9299, in Suva 331 5899, in Taveuni 888 0291)

Hertz (www.hertz.com; ☎ Nadi airport 672 3466, Nausori airport 338 0758, in Suva 338 0981)

Thrifty Car Rental (www.thrifty.com; ☎ Nadi airport 672 2935, in Suva 331 4436)

Although not widely available, motorcycles and scooters are not a bad way to travel in Fiji. Rates start at around F\$35/60 for scooters/125cc motorcycles. **Beat Rentals** (Nadi ☎ 672 1471; Queens Rd, Martintar; Suva ☎ 338 5355; Grantham Rd, Nabua) have been in the game for a while.

INSURANCE

Third-party insurance is compulsory and all car-rental companies add it onto the daily rental rate (count on F\$22 to F\$30 depending on the size of the vehicle). Personal accident insurance is highly recommended if you are not already covered by travel insurance. Renters are liable for the first F\$500 damage. Common exclusions, or problems that won't be paid for by the insurance company, include tyre damage, underbody and overhead damage, windscreen damage and theft of the vehicle.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the left-hand side of the road. The speed limit is 80km/h, which drops to 20km/h in towns. Many villages have speed humps to force drivers to respect the village pace. Seat belts are compulsory for front-seat passengers. Should you pick up a parking fine in Suva it's likely to be around F\$2.

Tours

Fiji has many companies providing tours within the country, including hiking, cycling, kayaking, diving, bus and 4WD tours. Cruises to the outer islands such as the Mamanucas and Yasawas are popular (see p185).

Viti Levu has the majority of tours, including two popular backpacker options.

Feejee Experience (☎ 672 0097; www.feejeeexperience.com) Fun and social hop-on, hop-off bus/accommodation tours. Four-/six-day tours F\$430/600.

Green Turtle Tours (☎ 672 8889; www.greenturtle-tours.com/fiji) Small group tours around Viti Levu. Three-/four-day tours F\$720/1100.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Guam

As Micronesia's most populous island, Guam is about as 'cosmopolitan' as it gets, so it cops a lot of attitude from Pacific snobs who reckon it lacks 'real island culture'. Sure, American accents are everywhere (it's an unincorporated US territory and many Guamanian homes fly the US flag) and the Chamorro language isn't really spoken any more. And if you never stray from Tumon Bay – the island's glitzy duty-free shopping and accommodation hub – then undeniably you'll be over- (or under-) whelmed.

But the island is currently in the throes of retooling itself. The tourism authorities talk of how 'Product Guam' (there's that American influence) needs a complete overhaul from its current status as a Pacific theme park for Japanese tourists. There may come a day soon when Chamorro culture (long subsumed by various invasions and occupations) is promoted above all else, with an increased focus on local food and the fascinating stories underlying many of the villages.

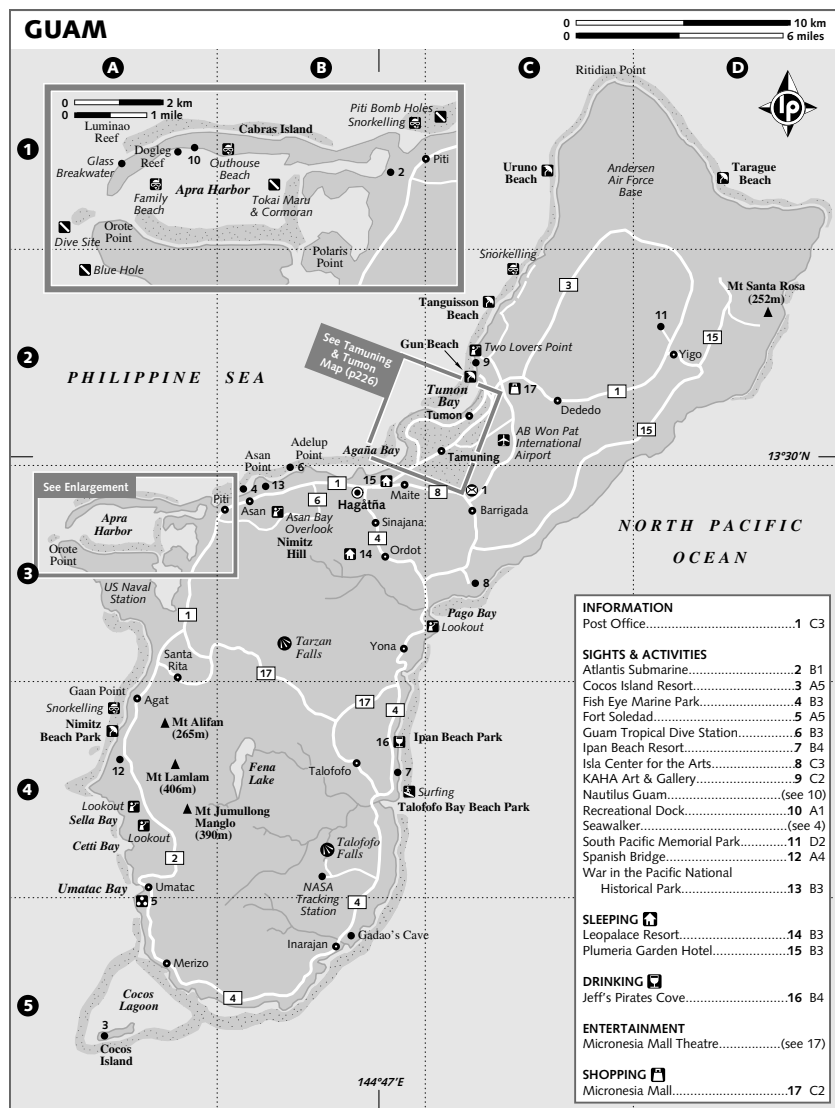
You can do your bit by escaping Tumon, exposing yourself to the best of Guam, and then spreading the word. The island, although Micronesia's largest, is small enough to explore in a day or two. The south is a must-see, with its rural kaleidoscope of sleepy, historical villages, stunning waterfalls and pristine beaches. The north is mainly taken up by the US military's Andersen Base, but even so it still contains Ritidian Point, a simply sublime stretch of coast featuring swaying palms, azure water and golden sands.

Along the way, chat to the proud locals who are working hard to restore their culture and you'll unearth a genuine community with a warm and welcoming attitude towards outsiders.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Relax at **Ritidian Point** (p226), a deserted and gorgeous beach, where the jungle meets the sand and butterflies meet you
- Eat and socialise with the locals at the **Chamorro Village Night Market** (p235), featuring Chamorro souvenir shops and food stands galore
- Picnic at **Talofofo Falls** (p231), a scenic and historic two-tier waterfall
- Reflect on Guam's turbulent WWII occupation when you visit the **War in the Pacific National Historical Park** (p227)
- Drive through **Southern Guam** (p228), a relaxed, rural and very different slice of island life





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Guam has a uniform climate: warm and humid throughout the year. Daily temperatures average a low of 22°C and a high of 30°C. The dry season (January to late April) provides the most pleasant weather, with slightly lower humidity and a monthly rainfall average of just 114mm.

Ominously, Guam is in a sector of the Pacific Ocean known as 'Typhoon Alley'; typhoons are said to hit the island once every eight years, usually during October and November. The most recent occurrence was in 2002, when Supertyphoon Pongsona stalled over Guam for a full day, with wind speeds of 180km/h that levelled over 1000

homes and killed four people. See p61 for more on typhoons, or see p827 for Pacific climate information.

HISTORY 'We Have'

The ancient Chamorro inhabited the Mariana Islands (Guam, Saipan, Rota and Tinian) at least as early as 1500 BC, probably migrating from Indonesia (they shared Southeast Asian language and customs). The Chamorro name for Guam was (and is) Guahan, meaning 'We Have', and the island was divided into districts, each made up of one or more villages mainly scattered along the coasts. There were *chamorro* (district nobles) but no island-wide leader, so the districts often fought, with slings and spears as weapons of choice.

...But Not for Much Longer

On 6 March 1521 the *Trinidad*, captained by Ferdinand Magellan, sailed into Guam's Umatac Bay.

In 1565 Miguel Lopez de Legazpi arrived in Guam and officially claimed the Marianas for Spain.

In 1668 the Jesuit priest Diego Luis de Sanvitores established a Catholic mission in Hagåtña (renamed Agaña under the Spanish). As the Jesuits gained influence they opposed indigenous traditions, forcing the Chamorros to rebel and fight back. By 1690 the ongoing violence, along with smallpox and influenza, had slashed the indigenous population from 100,000 to 5000. Most survivors were women and children, so Spanish soldiers and Filipino men were brought in to help repopulate the islands, intermarrying with Chamorro women.

Drawing the Coconut Curtain

In 1898, shortly after the US declared war on Spain, US captain Henry Glass sailed into Guam's Apra Harbor with guns ablaze. Comically, the Spanish governor greeted him as if they were old mates, the Spanish authorities having no idea the two nations were at war (they actually apologised for not having enough ammunition to return the American 'salute'). The next day the governor got the message and officially surrendered.

With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in late 1898, Spain ceded Guam to the US. In February 1941 US president Franklin D

GUAM FACTS

- **Capital:** Hagåtña
- **Population:** 169,000
- **Land area:** 549 sq km
- **International telephone code:** +1-671
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** English and Chamorro
- **Greeting:** *Hafa adai*
- **Website:** www.visitguam.org

Roosevelt declared Guam off limits to all visitors, a so-called 'Coconut Curtain' that remained in place until August 1962.

Great Shrine Island

On 8 December 1941, the same day as the strike on Pearl Harbor, Japanese bombers attacked Guam from Saipan. Guam was an undefended target, and on 10 December, within hours of 5000 Japanese forces coming ashore, the island's naval governor surrendered.

The Japanese forced the Japanese language on the Chamorros and renamed the island Omiyajima (Great Shrine Island), boasting that they would rule for a thousand years. Their reign lasted 31 months.

Originally, the Chamorros were largely left alone; islanders could live where they liked and were paid low wages for their labour. Towards the end, things turned nasty: the Chamorros were placed in work camps to build fortifications and forced into farming to provide food for Japanese troops, and in the final days of conflict there were several horrific massacres.

In one infamous incident, 40 Chamorro men were taken at night from their camp to carry provisions as the Japanese retreated to the north. On arriving in Tarague the Japanese, fearing the men would go back to their camp and give away their positions to the advancing US forces, tied them to trees and beheaded them.

Back to the Future

The US initiated pre-assault bombings on 17 July 1944. Four days later 55,000 US troops hit the beaches at Agat and Asan. The US secured Guam on 10 August after

fierce fighting, with 17,500 Japanese and 7000 US casualties. Hagåtña and many smaller villages were destroyed.

Large tracts of land, roughly one-third of Guam, were confiscated by the US military. When the war ended the military kept the land and turned the bases into permanent facilities. A 1986 class-action lawsuit for dispossessed landowners won a multimillion dollar settlement from the US government, although hopes that sizable tracts of land might be returned to the Chamorro people have been dashed by America's plans to boost its military presence on the island.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Politics has much the flavour of sport in Guam. It's said that the island has the best voter turnout of any US territory and certainly, come election time, you'll see banners, bumper stickers, and flag-waving, loudspeaker-toting supporters everywhere.

Recent talk has been of reuniting Guam with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) as a single political entity, thereby presenting a stronger voice in dealings with the US and the world.

Activism is on the rise (the group I Nasion Chamoru, or 'Chamorro Nation', leads the way). One of the biggest sticking points is the US' intention to increase its military presence on Guam. A growing number of Guamanians say that such a measure can only increase the island's potential as a terrorist target while also decreasing the Chamorros' chances of self-determination.

It's probably an understatement to say that Guamanians are fiercely protective of their identity. In 2005 American sportswriter Mike Ogle wrote an article for ESPN's website about the alleged propensity for cockfighting in Guam and managed to slip in a number of insensitive 'country bumpkin'-type statements. The outrage in Guam bubbled up to the governmental level, spilled out into an all-in Internet flame war, and resulted in the story being pulled and an ESPN flunky calling Guam's KUAM radio station to apologise on air.

Lifestyle

Guam can seem heavily Americanised (convenience stores; the world's largest K-Mart and all that) but present-day Chamorro

culture is also influenced by the island's Spanish colonial past, mainly in the form of Catholicism. Around 90% of Guam's Chamorro population are staunchly Roman Catholic and religion has a powerful sway on island culture. The signs of faith are everywhere, from Guam's unyielding anti-abortion mentality (despite a high rate of teenage pregnancy) to the village fiestas that revolve around the church.

In many ways, life on Guam revolves around the fiesta: each of Guam's 19 villages holds one on various dates throughout the year to honour their respective patron saints. See p238 for more information.

The Chamorro are working to reassert their pre-Spanish cultural heritage. There has been a revival in Chamorro dancing (see opposite) and there's a movement afoot to return Guam's villages to their original names (Hagåtña was the first to change).

Population

Around 70% of the population lives in the island's northern half.

Although the Chamorros are Guam's largest ethnic group, they comprise less than half of the population (43%) and there's a real danger that they'll soon be overtaken by the Filipinos, the next largest group. After the Filipinos, in terms of numbers, come other Micronesian groups, as well as sizable numbers of Koreans, Chinese and Japanese and fewer numbers of other Pacific peoples. There are about 23,000 US mainlanders, many of whom are active-duty military personnel and their family members.

Guam constantly contends with an influx of illegal immigrants, many from China.

BEST EATING

Guam's varied restaurant scene 'rocks' (to use the parlance of our times). The following establishments are especially recommended.

- Old Hagåtña Bar & Grill (p234) – seafood and old-time ambience.
- Genji (p235) – creative Japanese.
- Jamaican Grill (p235) – 'Jerik' chicken and ribs.

HOW NOT TO BUILD A LOCAL FILM INDUSTRY

Guam has had a few brushes with the film world, but for all the wrong reasons.

No Man Is an Island (1962), although filmed in the Philippines, tells the true story of George Tweed, a US Navy radioman who hid in a cave on Guam during the Japanese occupation, assisted by the local Chamorro people. The film plays fast and loose with the facts and is generally considered to be a pretty hackneyed and useless affair.

In the 1980s, sometime actor (and full-time loudmouth) Courtney Love put Guam in the headlines, making a big noise about having to work on the island as a stripper to support herself after she didn't get the part of Nancy in *Sid and Nancy* (1986). 'Courtney – spare us', an entire island state cried.

Then in 1998 the island was all set to host its first Hollywood production, *Guam on the Moon*, a comedy about a wealthy industrialist who planned to put Guam on the map by privately funding trips to the moon. Ominously, the production fell through and the project has been in development hell ever since.

2001 saw the release of *Arachnid*, a low-budget schlocker about a man who arrives at a clinic on Guam covered in bizarre bite marks. When investigators travel to the island he came from, their plane crashes and they become stranded in a forest festooned with killer spiders from outer space. The film sank without trace.

It gets worse. In 2005 *Max Havoc: Curse of the Dragon* was released, partly funded by a US\$1 million loan from Guam's government in the hopes that the film would kick-start a new wave of tourism and possibly a local film industry. Many 'chocolate-box' scenes are shot on the island, but the film – about a traumatised, retired martial artist who finds the strength to fight again – is beyond stink and has been panned by anyone unfortunate enough to have seen it. More disturbingly, there are allegations that the entire production was a scam, with latest reports suggesting that the producer has defaulted on the loan.

ARTS

Indigenous singing, chanting and cooking are showcased at Guam's many colourful fiestas.

Guam has few indigenous handicrafts to speak of, aside from those sold in Hagåtña's Chamorro Village.

The island hosts many music events throughout the year, like rock concerts and free jazz festivals at Polaris Point; check with the visitor information centre (p222) for details.

Chamorro dancing is making a comeback. The Gef Pa'Go Chamorro Cultural Village in Inarajan holds an annual dance festival, while the Pa'a Taotao Tano cultural group produces the annual Dinana Minagof Dance Festival and Competition.

LANGUAGE

Spanish never completely replaced the Chamorro language, even though an estimated 75% of modern Chamorro words are derived from Spanish. Although it has more guttural and repeated rhythmic sounds, Chamorro actually sounds a lot like Spanish.

English is now the language of choice, although in Tumon there's a great chance you'll hear more Japanese than English.

One Chamorro greeting you will hear and see everywhere is *hafa adai* (pronounced 'half a day'). Literally, it means 'what?' but it's sort of a 'hello', 'what's up?' and 'how are you?' all combined.

Chamorro basics

Hello.	<i>Hafa adai.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>
How are you?	<i>Hafa tatamanu?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Maolek.</i>
Please.	<i>Pot fa bot.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Si Yu'os ma'ase'.</i>
Yes.	<i>Hunggan.</i>
No.	<i>Ahe'.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Earthquakes are rare but not unknown. On 8 August 1993 the most powerful earthquake to hit Micronesia in a century rocked Guam. The quake, which measured 8.2 on the Richter scale, originated deep in the Marianas Trench. Then in April 2002 an earthquake

GUAM IN TWO DAYS

Chances are you'll be staying in or around Tumon Bay. Don't dismiss it out of hand; Tumon may be touristy, but you can still start your day right at **Ypao Beach Park** (p225) with a breakfast picnic, followed by a spot of snorkelling. Take lunch at one of **Tumon's many restaurants** (p234) before heading up north for superb views at **Two Lovers Point** (p225) and the sublime sea-and-sand experience that is **Ritidian Point** (p226). Later, if it's Wednesday, immerse yourself in an orgy of people-watching and food at the **Chamorro Village Night Market** (p235). If it's another day, finish the evening with a meal and a drink at the very special **Old Hagåtña Bar & Grill** (p234).

On day two, rent a car and devote yourself to **Southern Guam** (p228), a side of the island that many tourists are curiously blind to. Stop off at the **War in the Pacific National Historical Park** (p227) for a picturesque history lesson. Then move on to the beautiful villages of **Umatat** (p229), **Merizo** (p229) and **Inarajan** (p230), with their fascinating mix of Chamorro and Spanish influences. Keep on until the east coast, where you'll want to check out the popular **Talofofo Falls** (p231). Finish off with a bite to eat and a beer at **Jeff's Pirates Cove** (p236) while watching the sun set over the Pacific Ocean.

measuring 7.2 hit, followed in December that same year by Supertyphoon Pongsona.

Geography

Guam, the southernmost island in the Marianas chain, is about 48km long and 15km wide, narrowing to about 6.5km in the centre.

The north is the most developed and populated region, while the rural southern half features rainforest and villages. Natural features – jungle, waterfalls, mountains – dominate the interior.

ORIENTATION

Guam's airport is in Tamuning, around 1.6km northeast of Rte 1 (more commonly known as Marine Dr).

An 80km road circles the lower half of the island.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Café Catcrea (Map p226; ☎ 647 6495; Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; ☎ 11am–11pm; per 15 min US\$3) Free access with food or drink order.

Coffee Beanery (Map p226; Suite 107, Fountain Plaza, 720 Pale San Vitores Rd & 1411 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; per 15 min US\$2; ☎ 8am–10pm Sun–Wed, to 11pm Thu–Sat)

Nieves M Flores Memorial Library (Map p223; ☎ 472 6417; 254 Martyr St, Hagåtña; ☎ 9:30am–6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9:30am–8pm Tue & Thu, 10am–4pm Sat) Two Internet terminals with free access.

Medical Services

Guam Memorial Hospital (Map p226; ☎ 647 2330; 850 Gov Carlos Camacho Rd, Tamuning) The main civilian hospital.

Money

Credit cards are widely accepted and automatic teller machines (ATMs) abound. The Bank of Guam and the Bank of Hawaii together have about 20 branches in locations around Guam.

Bank of Guam Hagåtña (Map p223; ☎ 472 5300; 111 Chalan Santo Papa); Tumon (Map p226; ☎ 647-9132; 919 Pale San Vitores Rd)

Bank of Hawaii Hagåtña (Map p223; ☎ 479 3500; 134 W Soledad Ave); Tamuning (Map p226; ☎ 479 3500; 683 S Marine Dr)

Post

The post office has branches in Hagåtña and Tamuning.

Tourist Information

The **Guam visitor information centre** (Map p226; ☎ 646 5278/9; www.visitguam.org; 401 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tamuning; ☎ Mon–Fri 8am–5pm) is southeast of the Hilton.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Guam is a welcoming place, but be aware all the same. In recent years, the island has had a rash of burglaries and robberies, particularly over the Christmas period. Lock your hire car, no matter how long you're away for; park in well-lit areas and don't leave valuables in the vehicle; and don't openly count money. Apparently there's a scarcity of cops, not because there's a doughnut shortage but because the police department was one of the government agencies that felt the fullest effect of Guam's recent 'early out' retirement incentives.

HAGÁTÑA

pop 1400

Modest Hagåtña (Hag-[aht]-nya) is Guam's capital and has been the island's main centre (the name means 'blood') since the Spanish period – in an administrative sense, that is. If you're looking for nightlife, you won't find it here; instead, Hagåtña, with its parks, bridges and historic sites, is a pleasant place to stroll around for a few hours.

Central Hagåtña Walking Tour

Central Hagåtña is filled with historical sites, all within easy walking distance. An ambitious programme has been drawn up to restore the centre, complete with a sign-posted walking tour, but as seems to be the case with most public-works projects in Guam, it's already behind schedule, having barely left the planning stage. So, let's try and make do for now.

Start at **Paseo de Susana** (1; p225), north of central Hagåtña. At the park's northern tip there's a **mini Statue of Liberty** (2) and beyond that a breakwater where local surfers challenge the waves.

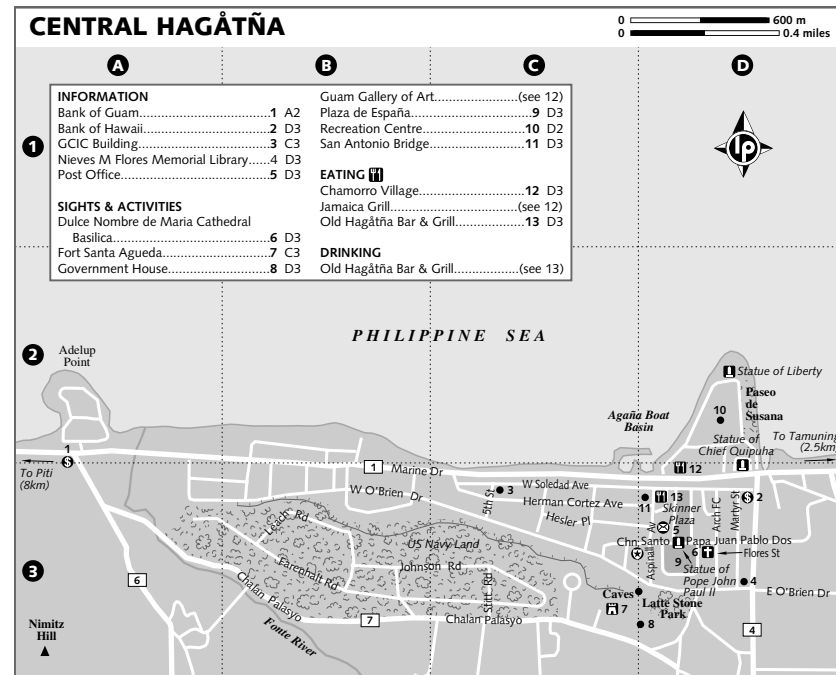
In the park's southeast section, a **statue of Chief Quipuha** (3) stands forever condemned to survey Hagåtña's congested traffic on Marine Dr (lucky Chief). Quipuha was Hagåtña's highest-ranking chief when the first mission was built on Guam.

The lively **Chamorro Village** (4; p235) is along the west side of the park, next to the **Agaña Boat Basin** (5).

Across Marine Dr is the **San Antonio Bridge** (6; p225), in an attractive park-like setting with seasonal flame trees. A stone plaque on the bridge honours St Anthony of Padua. Near the bridge is a statue of Sirena the Mermaid. Apparently, Sirena was a girl whose mother turned her into a mermaid because of her disobedience (obviously mum didn't believe in simply smacking her child).

About 100m east, Guam's first civilian governor, Carlton Skinner, lends his name to **Skinner Plaza** (7); this grassy strip contains a few memorials to Guam's war heroes and a statue of General Douglas MacArthur.

South of Skinner Plaza, bifurcating the road, is a 3m **statue of Pope John Paul II** (8).

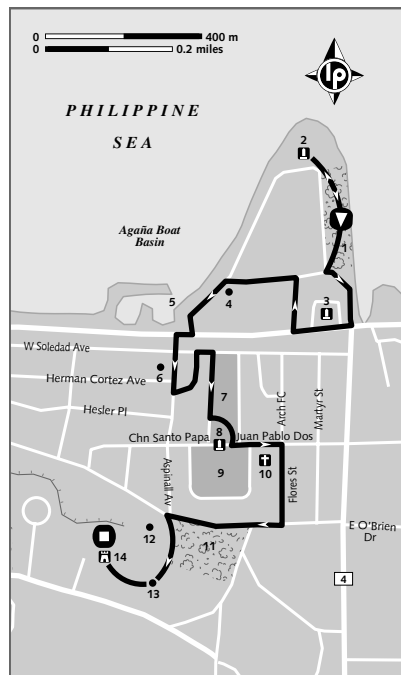


Based on countenance, the Pope's in a fine mood, and in fact he proves to be remarkably photogenic. And unique: he's a revolving Pope, making one complete turn every 24 hours. Near the statue is a war memorial honouring Guamanians killed during the Japanese invasion of 10 December 1941.

Across Chalan Santa Papa Juan Pablos Dos (that's the road) is **Plaza de España** (9; right), a peaceful refuge of Spanish-era ruins, old stone walls and flowering trees. Only a few of the Plaza's buildings survived the US pre-invasion bombings in 1944. One of these was the Chocolate House, a small, white circular building with a pointed tiled roof, where the wives of Spanish governors served afternoon refreshments to their guests, including...guess what.

WALK FACTS

Start Paseo de Susana
Finish Fort Santa Agueda
Distance About 2km
Duration 1½ hours



Next to the plaza is the **Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica** (10; below); Chief Quipuha and other Chamorro chiefs and church leaders are buried beneath the basilica floor.

Walk a short way south down Flores St, then turn into West O'Brien Dr; **Latte Stone Park** (11; below), at the base of Kasamata Hill, boasts ancient *latte* stones (see opposite) presiding over Hagåtña like a Chamorro Stonehenge (minus the hippies). The park also features a number of **Japanese-era caves** (12), built by Chamorro forced labour, in the hill face.

Above the park, 500m up Rte 7 from O'Brien Dr, is the governor's residence, called **Government House** (13; below). It's a Spanish-style structure dating to 1952.

The remains of **Fort Santa Agueda** (14; opposite) are a 10-minute walk from Government House, on the first road on the right after heading uphill from Government House. The view the fort affords of Hagåtña and the turquoise waters of the bay is unbeatable.

Plaza de España & Around

The plaza (Map p223) was the centre of Spanish administration from 1669; later, US naval governors continued to use it as a seat of government, as did the occupying Japanese. Buildings once completely surrounded the central park area: schools, priests' quarters, the governor's residence, a hospital, military compound, arsenal and town hall.

To the side of the plaza is the impressive **Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica** (Map p223). Above the main altar is a 30cm statue of Santa Marian Camarin, carved in ironwood and boasting human hair and an ivory face. Legend says it was guided to shore in the early 1800s from the waters off Merizo, by two golden crabs, each with a lighted candle between its claws.

Latte Stone Park & Around

It's said that the *latte* stones in this park (Map p223) are house pillars dating from AD 500. They were moved to this site from an ancient Chamorro village in the south-central interior of Guam.

The governor's residence, or **Government House** (Map p223; ☎ 477 9850), has a panoramic view of Hagåtña and a small

LATTE STONES

Latte stones are the most visible remains of early Chamorro culture. The upright posts were quarried from limestone and the rounded top capstones were of either limestone or brain coral. The stones are of such antiquity that at the time of the first Western contact, the islanders no longer knew what their purpose had been. Historians now believe the stones were used as foundation pillars for men's houses and for the homes of nobility. *Latte* stones vary from less than 1m high to as tall as 6m.

museum featuring Chamorro antiquities. Call before visiting.

Little remains of **Fort Santa Agueda** (Map p223), save for its stone foundation built of coral and burnt limestone. The fort, which once had 10 cannons, was built in 1800 as a lookout and has remarkable views of Agaña Bay.

The cut-stone **San Antonio Bridge** (Map p223; also known as the 'Old Spanish Bridge' or *To lai Achu*), from 1800, survived WWII bombing raids. During Hagåtña's reconstruction, the river it straddled was filled and now there's just a shallow pool.

Paseo de Susana & Around

This popular park and recreation centre (Map p223) sits upon an artificial peninsula created during the Hagåtña reconstruction.

The park is next to Chamorro Village (p235), a public market with kiosks, food vendors, produce sellers, a few handicraft artists and a lot of dogs. You can find indigenous art and handicrafts at the Village's **Guam Gallery of Art** (Map p223).

TUMON BAY

Tumon is the tourist centre of Guam; as Micronesia's most developed resort area, it draws strong reactions from people who assume the rest of Guam is as in-your-face. Tumon does have gorgeous palm-fringed, white-sand beaches, but these are lined with hotels, clubs, duty-free malls, plus Planet Hollywood and other American-themed businesses targeting the hip pocket of (mainly Japanese) tourists. Tumon does have a certain quality, with good bars, great restaurants and an

indisputably high-energy vibe, even if its main shopping and entertainment district is called 'Pleasure Island'.

Governor Joseph F Flores Beach Park

This spacious park, better known as **Ypao Beach Park** (Map p226), was once the location of an ancient Chamorro village and, in the late 1800s, a penal and leper colony. These days, it's still infectious but in a fun way, with playground equipment and BBQ facilities. The beachfront is spectacular, with white sand, turquoise waters, an awesome panoramic view of the bay, and terrific snorkelling opportunities.

Guam Zoological Botanical & Marine Garden

This funky **zoo and aquarium** (Map p226; ☎ 646 1477; Tumon Bay; adult/child under 12 yr US\$5/3; ☎ 9am-5pm) features monkeys, Palauan saltwater crocs, brown tree snakes, monitor lizards, coconut crabs, sharks, eels and tropical fish. You might find that it's small and obviously catered to kiddies, but the zoo still has a dollop of charm for older people.

Gun Beach

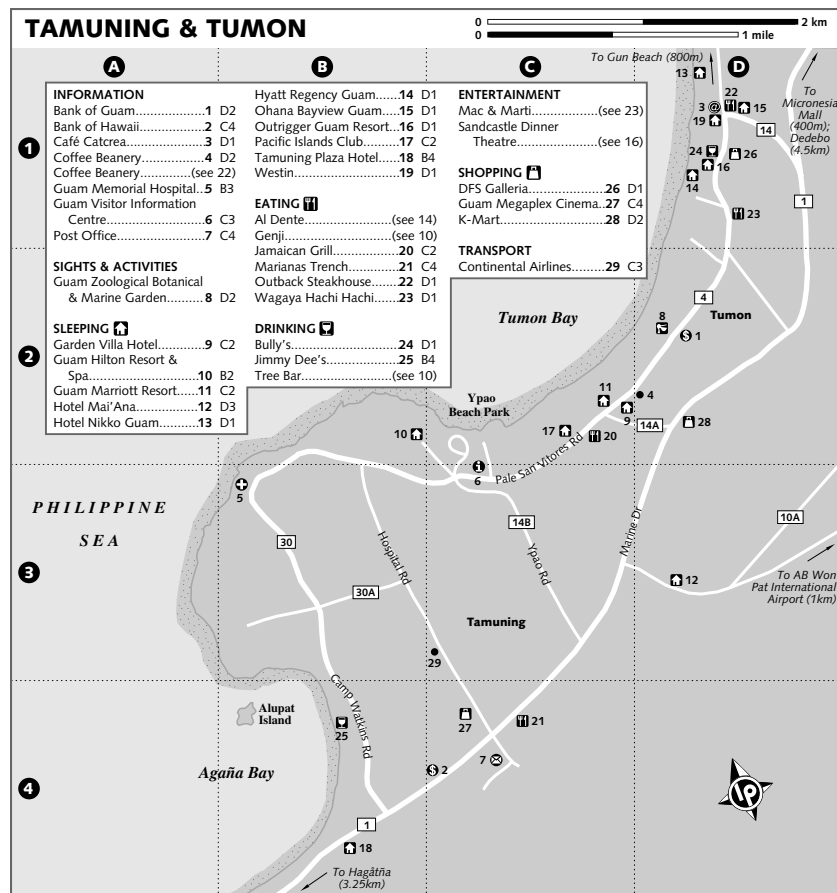
This **beach**, 500m down the coral road by the Hotel Nikko, is named for the rusted Japanese gun that rests half-hidden in jungle growth at the foot of the northside cliff, just behind the remains of a beachside pillbox. Mysteriously, people have been known to place toy guns and plastic swords by the real thing, like some kind of offering to the Gods of War. Arm yourself for best results.

Straight out from the centre of the beach, there's a cut in the reef that was made for the placement of underwater cables. Divers and snorkellers follow the cable out to deeper waters, where conditions are good when the water's calm.

Past the gun and around the point to the north is a lovely white-sand crescent. There was once an old Chamorro village in this area and *latte* stones can be found by following an overgrown trail that leads inland.

NORTHERN GUAM Two Lovers Point

Also known as Puntan Dos Amantes, **Two Lovers Point** (Map p218; ☎ 647 4107; www.twoloverspoint.com; admission US\$3; ☎ 8am-8pm) is a sheer



coastal lookout atop a 125m limestone cliff. It has an intriguing legend attached to it: two young Chamorro lovers, 'united for a last time', entwined their hair and jumped to their deaths from the jagged cliff after being hunted down by a Spanish captain who had been promised the girl in marriage.

The entire site is landscaped and peppered with picnic tables and also features a really deep basalt cave that drops steeply to the ocean; you can't descend but you can look down into it. Eerie stuff.

The site also hosts **KAHA Art & Gallery** (Map p218; ☎ 646 2781; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), featuring the work of Guamanian artists, including sculpture, photography and painting.

Ritidian Point

This **national wildlife refuge** (Map p218; 🕒 8am to 5pm), at the northernmost tip of the country, is administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The centre has a short path through the coconut-tree jungle, but the star attraction is the inviting, pristine sandy beach. Azure waters, golden beaches, swaying palms – these are the paradisiacal trappings of Ritidian Point. On weekdays the beach is gloriously empty (except for the odd stray fisherman); at weekends, families and picnicking groups pick up the slack. Swimming is possible (within defined areas), but be certain to keep close to shore to avoid the vicious currents further out.

South Pacific Memorial Park

This park in Yigo is a **WWII memorial site** (Map p218; 🕒 8am-5pm). The feature piece is a stylised 9m-high sculpture; it's supposed to represent large white hands folded in prayer, but will thrill any fan of abstract art. There's also a small Buddhist chapel that displays Japanese war artefacts: recovered tuna cans from gun emplacements; decaying bullet casings and gas masks; shredded footwear and uniforms. A macabre exhibit, to be sure – one half expects to find a skull or two for completeness' sake.

Steps lead down the hill from the monument to four caves from the last Japanese Army command post. On 11 August 1944, US soldiers detonated 400lb blocks of TNT at the opening of the caves; a few days later more than 60 bodies were removed. The caves are surrounded by a bamboo forest that creaks in the wind, an uncanny ambience that might just conjure up images of restless spirits.

WEST COAST Route 6

The 8km Rte 6 loop traverses from Adelup Point through the Nimitz Hill area to Piti, with west-coast views and glimpses into the interior. About 2.5km up there are two **hillside bunkers** on the right-hand side, remnants of a former Japanese command post.

The **Asan Bay Overlook**, past the school on Nimitz Hill, is where Japanese soldiers watched in consternation as Americans seized the beaches to reclaim Guam. These days, the wind-blown overlook houses a WWII monument: a crescent-shaped stone wall inscribed with the names of US and Chamorro victims of war.

War in the Pacific National Historical Park

A number of **former WWII battlefield sites** are part of the park's historical holdings. The Asan Beach unit includes **Asan Point** (Map p218), a big, peaceful and grassy beach park 1.6km further south, with guns, torpedoes and monuments.

Asan Beach was one of the major sites of the US invasion in July 1944, and an octagonal marble monument flanked by coconut trees was erected here in 1994 to mark the invasion's 50th anniversary. The area is now a favourite kite-flying and picnicking

spot. On the southwest side of the park, a 15-minute loop trail takes in a **cave** and a couple of **Japanese gun emplacements**.

Piti Bomb Holes

The bomb holes are actually **natural sinkholes** (Map p218) carved in the reef 90m offshore from Piti. They're ideal for beginner divers, as they bottom out at around 9m. From Tepungan Beach, the holes look like dark-blue circles in the aqua shades of the shallower water. Snorkellers might enjoy the hard, yellow corals around the edges of the holes, but the water is deep enough in the centres to make it difficult to see the bottom. Closer to shore you'll see bright blue starfish, zebra damselfish, puffer fish and other small tropicals. If you want to snorkel out to the holes rather than wade, do it at high tide, otherwise the near-shore waters can be quite shallow. Watch out for strong currents around the holes furthest out.

Fish Eye Marine Park

This **rotund structure** (Map p218; ☎ 475 7777; <http://fishyeguam.com>; 818 North Marine Dr, Piti; adult/child US\$16/12; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is at the end of a long walkway jutting out from the beach, reaching down into the largest of Piti's 'bomb holes'. Portholes 9m deep give wonderful close-up views of endless streams of fish, coral, and scuba divers. It's quite an experience to watch schools of marine life interacting with flapping humans (ungraceful and ugly by comparison), and if you don't dive, you may be tempted to pony up your PADI (Professional Association of Dive Instructors) fee after you've seen what all the fuss is about here.

Piti Guns

Three **Japanese coastal defence guns** preside over a hill behind Piti's Catholic church. It's only five minutes up to the first gun; the second gun is a couple of minutes further along the same path; and the third is at the end of a side path. The artillery is well preserved, and trudging up to find the guns along the (admittedly concrete) path, overgrown with hibiscus, while soaked in jungle sweat with lizards backing away from your feet, is a worthwhile experience.

To get here, turn left off Rte 1 onto JM Tuncap St in Piti, then turn right at the stop sign into Assumption St.

Apra Harbor

The Spanish developed this huge deepwater harbour (Map p218) in the 1700s for their Manila galleons. Now, in addition to US navy vessels, Apra Harbor has extensive commercial operations, a small boat harbour and space for cruise ships. A slew of sunken ships makes it popular with divers (see p76).

A peninsula marks the north side of the harbour; they call it Cabras Island. About halfway out, along the harbour side, is a **recreational dock** used by glass-bottom boats and the *Nautilus* semisubmarine (p238), as well as for other recreational activities. Just beyond the dock, look for a grove of ironwood trees on the left side of the road; they mark **Family Beach** (☉ 8am–6pm), a sandy harbourside strand that's popular for weekend outings.

To get to Family Beach, turn right onto Rte 11 at the traffic lights, then go straight past the Port Authority and oil tanks until the road ends. You'll need to pass a Coast Guard checkpoint, so be on your best behaviour and bring ID.

Dogleg Reef, fronting Family Beach, is good for snorkellers, with soft and hard corals and anemone colonies with clownfish. The waters are protected and the top of the reef, which starts just 1m underwater, is visible from shore.

When the seas are calm, **Luminao Reef**, stretching along the peninsula's north side, can also be snorkelled. It has good coral and small fish in waters 1.5m to 4.5m deep, accessible in several places along the road by short paths. To get here take the upper road to the right at the oil tanks.

At the US Naval Base at Orote Point, there's a **War Dog Memorial** – a statue of a Doberman keeping watch over the base's **war-dog cemetery**. During the WWII battle for Guam, 25 dogs were killed in action and buried on the island. During their active terms, some dogs explored caves, some were sentries, and some detected explosives.

Back on Rte 1, an apparently artificial **Polaris missile** guards the entrance to **Polaris Point**, part of the US naval station. Centuries from now, this might be half buried in the sand, *Planet of the Apes* style, for future archaeologists to unearth and cherish as a sample of 'authentic indigenous culture'.

Gaan Point

The **park** at Gaan Point is also known as the War in the Pacific National Historical Park – Agat Unit. On 21 July 1944, US marine and army combat divisions came ashore to battle with the heavily fortified Japanese infantry. From coastal caves and pillboxes, the Japanese mowed down the Americans as they leapt from their landing crafts. In the first few hours there were more than 1000 US casualties; US tanks made it ashore on the third day, knocking the Japanese out from behind, to finally secure the beachhead.

The park features **artillery**: a large, 20cm coastal defence gun and an anti-aircraft cannon, as well as **intact bunkers**. There's a US **WWII amtrac** 366m out and 15m down that's coveted by divers.

SOUTHERN GUAM

Rent a car and drive around the southern part of the island: the circle road winds in and out of rural villages, which seem so far removed from Tumon and Tamuning that it's hard to believe that they're on the same island. There are breath-stealing coastal and mountaintop views along the way and historic sites that tell the story of Guam from Magellan through to WWII. Don't miss this experience.

Taleyfac Bridge

In the late 1700s the Spanish built a coastal road to link Hagåtña with Umatac and other southern villages, connected by several stone bridges. The best-preserved **Spanish bridge** (Map p218) is in Agat at Taleyfac, just a little beyond Nimitz Beach Park, and 70m back from Rte 2. It's a picturesque construction, 10.8m long, with twin stone arches spanning a narrow river.

Sella Bay Vista Point & Trail

About 4km south of Agat, the road rises up the coastal hills to a **roadside lookout** (Map p218) offering a wondrous view of Sella Bay and the surrounding coast. If it's been raining, glance inland to the northeast for a view of a cascading waterfall.

From the lookout parking area, a well-defined **red-clay trail** leads down to Sella Bay, the site of an ancient Chamorro village. The walk is scenic, but watch out for slippery mud and for trailside sword grasses that can

slice through soft flesh. An **old Spanish bridge** dating from the 1790s still crosses the Sella River close to the coast. There are also a few other overgrown remnants of earlier habitation, including an old **beehive oven** and some **latte stones**. Allow around 1½ hours to make the hike down and back.

Cetti Bay Vista Point

This is where you'll find the most panoramic **roadside vista** (Map p218) on the southwest coast. The lookout offers an unbeatable view of the palm-lined Cetti River Valley and charming Cetti Bay. You can also see Cocos Island, the Merizo Barrier Reef, which encloses Cocos Lagoon, and the whole southwest coastline.

Mt Lamlam & Mt Jumullong Manglo

Inland from the Cetti Bay Vista Point, topped with large wooden crosses, is **Mt Jumullong Manglo** (Map p218; 390m), or Humuyung Manglu, the final destination of cross-bearers during the island's annual Good Friday procession.

The starting point for a trail that goes up Mt Jumullong Manglo is across the road from the Cetti Bay Vista Point. Head up an eroded hill then continue along the mostly well-defined trail. At the divide, go to the right to reach the crosses. There are excellent views of both the coast and the interior forests on the way and the hike takes around an hour. A more difficult, obscure trail continues left from the divide to **Mt Lamlam**, Guam's highest point at 406m. Lamlam means 'lightning' and legend calls it the source of the winds.

Umatac

pop 887

This unspoilt, friendly village (Map p218) is soaked in history. Prior to Magellan's 1521 landing in Umatac Bay, a spot just north of Umatac was reckoned by the Chamorros to be where the first people were created; they celebrated the event annually. Then came Magellan. His landing is celebrated in the village each March with four days of activities, culminating in Discovery Day, a re-enactment of the event. There's a tall, concrete **monument to Magellan** in the village centre.

Opposite the Magellan monument are the ruins of the **Saint Dionicio Church**, originally

built in the 1690s, reconstructed in 1862, and destroyed by an earthquake in 1902.

There's a **Japanese Zero fighter plane** in the bay about 137m from the beach and 15m under water – it makes for a good dive.

On the way out of town is the decorative **Umatac Bridge**, with its spiral staircase towers intended to symbolise Guam's Chamorro-Spanish heritage.

Fort Soledad

Fort Nuestra Señora de la Soledad (Map p218) offers a stunning hilltop view of Umatac Bay and the coastline to the north; on a clear day the aesthetic qualities of the sky and bay defy belief.

The Spanish built the fort in the early 1800s to protect their treasure-laden Manila galleons from western-Pacific pirates; the main remnant of the structure is a small hillside sentry post.

To get there take the ironwood-lined road on the right after crossing the Umatac Bridge.

Merizo

pop 2100

Guam's southernmost village (Map p218) was founded in 1695, largely as a resettlement site for Chamorro people from the Northern Marianas; they were forced to abandon their homes for a life in southern Guam, converted to Christianity under the Spanish 'reduction' policy.

The courtyard of **San Dimas Church** holds a monument to the 46 Chamorros executed by the Japanese in July 1944, one week before the US invasion of Guam.

Next door are the ruins of **Merizo Conbento**, built by the Spanish in 1856, soon after the smallpox epidemic that killed almost two-thirds of the population. The *conbento* (convent) was constructed of ifil wood and manposteria (burnt limestone mixed with coral rocks).

Directly across the street is Kampanayun Malessu, the **Merizo Bell Tower** built in 1910 under the direction of Father Cristobal De Canals and restored in 1981.

Cocos Island

This 2.4km-long atoll (Map p218), 4km offshore from Merizo, sits within a huge barrier reef. The good beaches and calm waters make it ideal for water sports.

Cocos Island Resort (☎ 828 8691), on the island's eastern side, is a day-trip destination offering jet-skiing, parasailing, kayaking, banana boats, snorkelling, diving, dolphin adventure cruises, windsurfing lessons, rentals and a hodgepodge of tours and other activities.

Boats make the 10-minute journey to the resort from Merizo Pier for US\$40, departures from 9am to 4pm; the fare includes the day-use fee and lunch. You can't bring food or beverages to the resort, but there is a snack bar.

Inarajan & Around

Founded in 1695, Inarajan (Map p218; population 3052) and its Spanish-era influence is still detectable.

Salugula Pool, on the roadside just before the village, is a natural saltwater pool with diving platforms and arched bridges that are now in disrepair as a consequence of the harsh storms that whip the south coast. Jagged, grey lava rocks separate the calm pool from the crashing ocean surf beyond, and there's a top coastal view. Locals gather here for good vibes and a sociable atmosphere,

and you can dig it too, if you have the right spirit.

The body of Chamorro priest Jesus Baza Duenas is buried beneath the altar of Inarajan's **St Joseph's Church**. Duenas, his nephew and two other Chamorro were beheaded by the Japanese near the end of the war for failing to reveal the whereabouts of US navy radio man George Tweed (see the boxed text, p221).

Along the waterfront is the **Gef Pa'Go Chamorro Cultural Village** (☎ 828 7246/778; www.gef-pago.org; ☎ 9am-3pm), a publicly funded complex of bamboo and thatch shelters where traditional Chamorro crafts are demonstrated. This simple concept is delightfully presented: cookies are baked in an old beehive oven; coconut fronds are woven into hats and baskets; coconut candy and sea salt is made; rope is made from bark; *katupat* (little rice lunch bags) are prepared; and you can even ride a carabao, a kind of water buffalo.

Just beyond the cultural village are the crumbling, powerfully atmospheric ruins of a concrete **Baptist church**, built in 1925. Next to it, a **bronze sculpture** depicts a local legend about an encounter between two powerful Chamorro chiefs, Malaguana of Tumon and Gadao of Inarajan (see left).

From the sculpture you can see some caves in the cliffs across the bay, not far from the point; one of them is **Gadao's Cave** (Map p218), boasting ancient pictographs said to be the canoe story drawn onto the wall by Gadao himself.

To get to the caves, drive north out of town on Rte 4. Just across the bridge, take the first sealed road to the right and park at the far end of the beach, just before the road turns inland. Walk 15 minutes along the beach and take the trail across a meadow and up a cliff to the caves. Some of this land may be private property, so if you see anyone along the way ask their permission to continue.

EAST COAST Tarzan Falls

These falls (Map p218; known as Kanuon in Chamorro) are comprised of a series of cascading drops from 2.5m to 15m high with a deep pool at the base, perfect for swimming. There are a number of well-marked trails throughout the island that

can be tackled on foot or by mountain bike; it's a favourite of 'boonie stompers' (hikers, in other words). The falls are best approached via Rte 17.

Talofofo Falls

This popular **swimming and picnic spot** (Map p218; ☎ 647 2436; adult/child US\$13/5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) is set around a lovely two-tier cascade, with pools beneath each waterfall. A few years back it had much of its ambience wrecked by the addition of some kind of faux-medieval gate and a **gondola** to ferry visitors down the steep grade from the parking area to the falls.

Still, the site's natural beauty overwhelms. At the bottom is a **wooden swinging bridge** with a splendid view of the falls. A small **museum** has colourful murals and historical models along its narrow passages. There's a 9m drop on the top fall, though it's usually gentle enough to stand beneath. The deeper and larger pool is at the base of the second fall, where the water flows gently over a very wide rock face.

Take the marked turn-off about 4km north of Inarajan on Rte 4, then a right turn about 2.4km on, following the signs to the falls. Car parking is about 1.6km further.

A 10-minute trail through the jungle leads to the **Yokoi Caves**, where a Japanese soldier subsisted for 28 years after WWII. Bring a flashlight.

Talofofo Beaches

Back on Rte 4, **Talofofo Bay Beach Park** (Map p218) is about 3.3km further on. This is one of Guam's prime surfing spots, where Guam's longest and widest river, the Talofofo, runs out into the bay and the sand is chocolate brown.

Four kilometres down the road is **Ipan Beach Park**, another popular swimming place with calm, shallow water and ironwood shade trees.

The **Ipan Beach Resort** (☎ 789 4989; www.ipan-beach.com) offers snorkelling, swimming, volleyball, river cruising and go-karting. You can also camp here or stay in the on-site bungalows.

Pago Bay & Around

An **unmarked viewpoint**, just past the town of Yona, looks over the Pago River as it empties into broad Pago Bay. There was once a

Spanish village at the mouth of the river but its inhabitants were wiped out in the 1856 smallpox epidemic.

The area between Pago Bay on the east coast and Agaña Bay on the west is the narrowest part of the island. According to legend, a giant fish wanted to divide Guam in half, so it liked to nibble away at this neck of land. Guam was saved by the women of the island, who cut off their long hair, wove a big net from their locks and scooped up the fish with the net.

North of Pago Bay, at the University of Guam, the **Isla Center for the Arts** (Map p218; ☎ 735 2965, 735 2966; www.uog.edu/isla/index.htm; UOG Station, University of Guam, Mangilao) showcases regular exhibitions of works by artists from all over Micronesia.

ACTIVITIES

The calmest swimming waters are along the west coast; Tumon Bay has the busiest beaches.

Boating

See p238 for boating options.

Diving & Snorkelling

If you're curious about diving but don't want to make a full-blown commitment, try the Seawalker (p238) or Snuba (see p238) technologies—kind of like 'diving lite'.

Guam's waters are home to numerous war wrecks and a rich array of marine life—more than 800 species of fish and 300 species of coral.

There are a couple of dozen popular dive spots on the west coast, many in or south of Apra Harbor. For advanced divers, Blue Hole at the end of Orote Peninsula is the grail. At about 18m, divers in a free fall can descend a perpendicular shaft in the reef; at about 38m, there's a window that allows divers to exit. The area is known for its large fish and superb visibility; at night there are flashlight fish in the deeper reaches.

One of the more unusual wreck dives is to the *Tokai Maru*, a Japanese freighter bombed during WWII in Apra Harbor. In a strange case of synchronicity, as it sank it landed beside the *Cormoran*, a German cruiser scuttled during WWI, which rests on its side on the ocean floor; at about 29m you can have one hand on each war. The uppermost part of the *Tokai Maru* is only

GO GO GADAO

According to legend, Tumon's Chief Malaguana, weary of hearing exaggerated rumours about the strength of Gadao, a rival chief in the southern part of Guam, set out in his canoe for Inarajan determined to kill Gadao.

When Malaguana reached Inarajan, a stranger invited him to dinner. Unknown to him, that man was Gadao. When Gadao asked his guest to get a coconut for dinner, Malaguana shook a coconut tree and the coconuts fell like rain. Gadao then picked up one of the coconuts and crushed it open with one hand.

After a few more such contests, Malaguana became worried – if this common Inarajan man was so strong, what would his chief be like? So Malaguana asked the man to take him back to Tumon by canoe. Both chiefs got in the canoe but paddled in opposite directions. The canoe broke in half but Malaguana, in his urgency to leave, was paddling so fast that he didn't even notice until he was back in Tumon.

12m from the water's surface, so it can make a good beginner dive.

See p238 for a list of dive operators.

Some of the better snorkelling spots are Gun Beach (p225), where the seas are calm; Ypao Beach (p225); Outhouse Beach on the north side of Apra Harbor (p228); and the Piti Bomb Holes (p227).

Fishing

Deep-sea fishing boats leave from Agaña Boat Basin and Apra Harbor on the search for marlin, wahoo, yellowfin tuna, sailfish, barracuda and *mahimahi*. A 523kg Pacific blue marlin, caught off Ritidian Point by a Guamanian in 1969, broke the world record at the time. For information on chartering a fishing boat, contact the visitor information centre (p222).

Hiking

Guam has many excellent hikes, and the Department of Parks and Recreation organises **boonie stomps** (the islander term for hikes or treks) on Saturday mornings. This is a terrific way to see another side of Guam, with stomps ranging from easy to difficult and covering sites of major historical and cultural interest, including a welter of beaches and waterfalls, caves, mountains, *latte* sites and WWII sites all over the island. See p238.

Surfing & Windsurfing

Guam's not a prime surfing locale, but it is possible to catch a wave; the best conditions are between December and June. Beginners generally prefer Talofofo Bay, while the more experienced surf the channel near Agaña Boat Basin.

Windsurfing is practised in Tumon Bay and in Cocos Lagoon, and yachting and outrigger-canoe riding (see p238) are also popular.

Some of the larger Tumon Bay hotels have beach huts that offer outrigger-canoe rides and windsurfing lessons. It's also possible to hire catamarans and other water-sports equipment.

GUAM FOR CHILDREN

There is plenty of water-splashing fun, animal adventures and fiesta madness for kids to revel in when visiting Guam. If hunger is on the cards, head down to the Chamorro

Village Night Market (p235) in Hagåtña for an island-stylin' BBQ feast; the food, crowds and buskers make for a fun family night out. The market is next door to Paseo de Susana (p225), a spacious park that's perfect for throwing the Frisbee or burning off a bit of raw energy with a game of chasey. Guam has some great beaches: Ypao Beach Park (p225) in Tumon not only has a spectacular beachfront but it also backs onto a huge, grassy park with BBQ facilities. Naturally, Family Beach (p228), with a name like that, makes the cut. Also in Tumon, the Guam Zoo & Aquarium (p225) is kiddie-oriented, with cutesy examples of Micronesian animals. On the west coast, Fish Eye Marine Park (p227) affords the entire family a chance to view marine life without even touching the water, as do the Nautilus (p238) and Aquarius (p238) semi-submarines, and various dolphin-watching tours (see below). But if the ankle biters do want to get wet, try snorkelling at the Cocos Island (p230) or Ipan Beach (p231) resorts. Then there's the Pacific Islands Club (p234) in Tumon; even if you're not staying there, you can still pay to frolic at the PIC's enormous water park, guaranteed to keep the most hyperactive urchin busy until dinner time at least. Beautiful Talofofo Falls (p231) is ideal for a scenic picnic, while the Gef Pa'Go Chamorro Cultural Village (p230) is primo for exploring a bit of local culture. If all else fails, try a village fiesta (p238) for safe, friendly and colourful good times.

TOURS

Discover Guam (☎ 649 8687, 888 3958; discover@guamcell.net; PO Box 2860, Hagåtña) Try the Island Discovery Tour (US\$60), focusing on history and culture in southern and central Guam, the Southern Island Tour (US\$75), and more.

Fish Eye Marine Park (☎ 649 5314, 649 5315) Take the Piti Bomb Hole Snorkelling Tour (adult/child 3-7 yr/child 8-11 yr US\$45/25/35); the Dolphin Watching Tour (adult/child 3-7 yr/child 8-11 yr US\$65/35/40); or the Sunset Cruise (adult/child 3-7 yr/child 8-11 yr US\$115/30/50).

Lam Lam Tours (☎ 649 5314/5) Offers tours, bus passes, and shuttle rides, including the Two Lovers Point Shuttle (US\$2), and the Circle Island South Route (US\$25), taking in Gaan Point, Talefac Bridge, the Cetti Bay Overlook, Fort Soledad, Merizo Pier and Jeff's Pirates Cove.

Turtle Tours (☎ 646 1710, 646 8331; www.adventureguam.com; PO Box 6098 Tumun) Offers the Adventure River Cruise (adult/child US\$65/37); the Jungle Hiking Tour

(adult/child US\$80/45), through 'Guam's most beautiful and ecologically fascinating sites'; and a Dolphin-Watching Adventure (adult/child US\$60/35).

SLEEPING

Most accommodation is in Tumon and Tamuning. Make sure you check out the larger hotels' websites before booking; they often have Internet specials that are substantially discounted.

BUDGET

Tamuning Plaza Hotel (Map p226; ☎ 649 8646; www.guamhotel.com; 960 S Marine Dr; s/d/st US\$49/58/68; ☎ ☎ ☎) This hotel has large rooms featuring a refrigerator, cable TV, air-con, phone and comfy beds; the kitchenette rooms are spacious and good value. There are no fancy trimmings but the staff are really cheery and friendly and will help you uncover the best of Guam (actually, it would be hard to find more accommodating staff). There's a laundrette on site, a restaurant and bar, free airport transfers and cheap car hire.

Hotel Mai'Ana (Map p226; ☎ 646 6961; maiana@ite.net; 253 Chalan Pasaheru, Tamuning; studio/1-bedroom unit from US\$90/100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This clean, basic place has tropical-style landscaping and good amenities. The rooms are studio-style, spacious though boxy – if that makes any sense. It's close to the airport, and would make a great deal of sense to business travellers who don't mind a few less frills.

Also recommended:

Plumeria Garden Hotel (Map p218; ☎ 472 8831; PO Box 7863, Tamuning; s/d US\$50/55; ☎ ☎ ☎) Pink-and-white exteriors, a courtyard, and what looks like

a pool inside a car park. Reasonably sized rooms with balconies look out onto Concrete City, but it's close to the action. It's near the intersection of Rte 1 and Rte 8. **Harmon Loop Hotel** (☎ 632 3353; 1900 Harmon Loop Rd, Dededo; s US\$50, d from US\$55; ☎ ☎ ☎) Motel-style option above a small shopping centre. No-fuss, no frills – straightforward but clean. Rental cars are US\$40 per day.

MIDRANGE

Ohana Bayview Guam (Map p226; ☎ 646 2300; www.ohanahotels.com; 1475 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumun; r from US\$89; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Ohana, away from the Tumon Bay beachfront and its seething masses of humanity, is a pleasing alternative to the scale and bustle of the bigger resort hotels. It boasts an intriguing '50s-style lobby furnished with native elements (faux bamboo and so on) and clean and comfortable rooms with king beds and Asian-style interior design. The hotel features a large terrace (but a small pool) and a spa. Guests can also use the Outrigger Resort's facilities.

Garden Villa Hotel (Map p226; ☎ 647 0850; www.guamvilla.com; 800 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumun; r from US\$100; ☎ ☎ ☎) A faux Spanish-hacienda-style hotel featuring large, pleasant studio-style accommodation, some with wheelchair access. You could fit a family in them; each room has four single beds.

TOP END

Hyatt Regency Guam (Map p226; ☎ 647 1234; http://guam.regency.hyatt.com; 1155 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumun; r from US\$185; ☎ ☎ ☎) The 455-room Hyatt could be Tumon's swankiest hotel, with a lovely beach out back, grand pillared lobby, beautifully landscaped grounds featuring

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Leopalace Resort (Map p218; ☎ 471 0001; www.leopalaceresort.com; 221 Lake View Dr, Yona; r from US\$150) The Leopalace has to be seen to be believed. It's squarely aimed at the Japanese market, but even if you're not staying here it's still worth a visit – because this is about as opulent as it gets. The resort is set amid a massive hilltop setting, '2½ times the size of Disneyland and DisneySea combined' according to the publicity. Indeed, it's an awe-inspiring sight as you drive up the hills and begin to realise the true scale and scope of this colossal complex. The grounds contain more sporting facilities than you can shake a jockstrap at: soccer fields, golf courses, a water park and baseball fields (Japanese professional baseball teams stay and train at the Leopalace in the off season). Then there's the ostentatious man-made lake surrounding the hotel itself, filled with fountains and statues of lions and other awe-inspiring creatures. Naturally, the views are breathtaking, being up in the Manenggon Hills, especially at sunset when everything is draped in a dreamy ambience.

Inside, there's a grand lobby/atrium, a bowling alley, numerous bars and restaurants, and suitably elegant rooms.

pools and interconnecting waterways, excellent restaurants, and rooms with ocean-front balconies, soaking tubs and luxurious details like heavy shade curtains and marble vanities. Every inch oozes class, from the Lobby Lounge to the Grand Ballroom.

Guam Marriott Resort (Map p226; ☎ 649 7827; www.marriotthotels.com; 627B Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; r from US\$270; ☎ ☎ ☎) The beds are bouncy and comfy, even in the standard rooms, although those floral bed covers leave a lot to be desired. In all other respects, the Marriott is more restrained and subdued than the other Tumon resorts. You can tell a hotel's ambience by its lobby and grounds music: the Hilton, cheesy reggae; the PIC, bangin' techno...and the Marriott? Classical, even in the toilets.

Hotel Nikko Guam (Map p226; ☎ 649 8815; www.nikkoguam.com; PO Box 12819; r from US\$270) The Nikko is a very impressive option, gigantic in scale, with the feel of a mini city. Not only that, but a mini city on a cliff – its grounds extend below to the sand and water, right next to Gun Beach. The bar has one of the best views in Tumon, with massive floor-to-ceiling windows that are beautiful for sunset watching; the 16th-floor restaurant possibly tops that, though. All rooms have ocean views, and give you the room to space out in comfort, although floral bed covers make yet another appearance, seemingly de rigueur for Tumon resorts.

Outrigger Guam Resort (Map p226; ☎ 649 9000; www.outrigger.com; 1255 Pale San Vitores Rd; r from US\$290; ☎ ☎ ☎) This 600-room resort is in the thick of Tumon Bay, right next to the Hard Rock Cafe. The delectable rooms have comfy, bouncy beds; interiors are all chocolate-brown and white with stylised leopard-skin trims; and there doesn't appear to be a cheesy floral quilt in sight. The lobby and restaurant come on like a cross between 'generic Vegas' and an airport lounge.

Guam Hilton Resort & Spa (Map p226; ☎ 646 1835; www.hilton.com; 202 Hilton Rd, Tumon; r from US\$175; ☎ ☎ ☎) You've got to hand it to the Hilton – it's a fully self-contained world. It can actually be fun walking through the complex, even if you're not staying, and just marvelling at the lengths people will go to not leave their hotel. Bars, sauna, pools, restaurants – it's all here. Rooms are comfortable, but the Tower building is better value than the main wing, where

the accommodation at the lower end of the scale can be drab and in need of a touch up. The location is super – at the quieter end of Tumon Bay, beside Ypao Beach – although the Hilton, unlike the other resorts, has no beach of its own.

Also recommended:

Pacific Islands Club (Map p226; ☎ 646 9171; www.picresorts.com/guam/eng/index.htm; PO Box 9370, Tamuning, Pale San Vitores Rd; r from US\$275; ☎ ☎ ☎) Massive grounds with all manner of kiddie-oriented water features and watery amusements – extraordinary considering there's a great beach right out back. The spacious, though bland, rooms have awesome ocean views. The last word in over-the-top resort-style living.

Westin (Map p226; ☎ 647 1020; www.westin.com/guam; 105 Gun Beach Rd, Tumon; r from US\$190; ☎ ☎ ☎) Luxurious rooms with city- or bay-view balconies, all wood panelling and hidden angles – a streamlined, retro-country-club effect. Bathrooms feature a 'fully customisable shower experience', complete with 'eight additional inches of elbow room'. Say what?

EATING

Guam has a fixation with Spam – the Hormel company has even developed a special 'Guam Spam' with a hot-and-spicy flavouring that mimics Tabasco, another Guamanian obsession. Also, at one stage during the 1970s, Guam had the highest global 'volume sales' of Kentucky Fried Chicken, and was even presented with a special award by Colonel Sanders himself to honour this achievement.

How bizarre, then, that the island has the best restaurant scene in Micronesia,

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Old Hagåtña Bar & Grill (Map p223; ☎ 472 5885; 230 West Soledad Ave; mains US\$13-27; ☎ lunch & dinner) The 'Old Hag' is an elegant restaurant that shares the superb ambience of the old-time, wood-panelled bar (see p236) it adjoins. It's among Guam's top dining options, boasting a consistently light, inventive and absolutely delicious menu, as recent offerings like miso-rubbed strip loin steak and shitake-and-prosciutto-wrapped mahimahi testify. Sit back in those soft-leather chairs and salivate. Refreshingly, it's away from the Tumon Bay madness, and altogether more laidback and refined as a result.

CHAMORRO FOOD

Chamorro food is a rich mix of Spanish, Filipino and Pacific dishes.

- *Ahu* is grated coconut boiled in sugar water.
- *Bonelos aga* is banana dipped in a sweet flour batter and deep-fried.
- *Cadon guihan* is fish cooked in coconut milk with onions and sweet peppers.
- *Escabeche* is fresh fish marinated in vinegar and soy sauce.
- *Golai hagoin sumi* is taro leaves cooked in coconut milk.
- *Kelaguen* is minced chicken, fish, shrimp or Spam mixed with lemon, onions, pepper and shredded coconut.
- *Lumpia* is similar to an egg roll, but dipped in garlic sauce or vinegar.
- *Pancit* is a mix of shrimp, vegetables and garlic over noodles.
- *Poto* is a rice cake of *tuba* (coconut wine), sugar and rice meal.

Other local delicacies include whole roast pig, tropical fruits, yams, coconut crabs, red rice made with *achiote* (annatto) seeds and anything barbecued. To turn ordinary dishes into a Chamorro meal ask for *finadene*, a hot sauce made from fiery red peppers, soy sauce, lemon juice and chopped onions.

As do Palauans, Chamorros love fruit-bat pie – too much, in fact. The fruit bat has become endangered on Guam due to culinary consumption and it's now illegal to poach them.

The best Chamorro food is generally found at village fiestas (p238) and private feasts; also try the Chamorro Village Night Market in Hagåtña (below).

featuring a wide range of styles and nationalities. Most of the action is centred in Tumon Bay.

Genji (Map p226; ☎ 646 3463; Guam Hilton Resort & Spa, 202 Hilton Rd, Tumon; mains from US\$25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This Japanese restaurant, recently reopened after suffering damage during Supertyphoon Pongsona, has a very loyal following. The food is as intricate and as fresh as the mod-Japanese interior design. Genji's teppanyaki and sashimi is a speciality, but if that doesn't appeal, kick back at the sushi and sake bar for a gay old time indeed.

Jamaican Grill (Hagåtña Map p223; ☎ 472 2000; Chamorro Village; Tumon Map p226; ☎ 647 3000; Carl Rose Plaza, Pale San Vitores Rd; mains US\$9-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) This bar and grill is all the rage for its 'jerk'-style menu (jerk being a unique Jamaican blend of spices and marinade straight outta Kingston). Servings are massive, but you can hedge your bets and choose the Triple Combo: grilled local fish, a quarter jerk chicken and four Boston-style ribs, served with salad and rice. There are a few veggie options, including grilled jerk vegetables with fruit-soy dressing. If you're wondering how the owners became 'jerks', it's down to Guam's love of a good barbe-

cue, the Chamorro passion for spicy foods, and a general Guamanian zeal for reggae.

Al Dente (Map p226; ☎ 647 1234; Hyatt Regency Guam, 1155 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; mains US\$35-55; ☎ lunch & dinner) This fine Italian restaurant features a consistently inventive and refreshing menu. The wood-fired pizzas, prepared in an open kitchen, are a standout, and there's a great view of the gardens and hotel grounds.

Chamorro Village Night Market (Map p223; Chamorro Village, Hagåtña; dishes US\$3-5; ☎ Wed 6-9pm) On Wednesday nights, Chamorro Village bursts into a colourful minifesta frequented by locals and tourists alike, with bands, buskers, dances, craft stalls and more barbecue stands than you can point a (kebab) stick at, serving Chamorro faves like *kelaguen* (chopped-and-spicy chicken or beef with lemon juice, grated coconut and hot peppers) and barbecued spareribs with red rice. There's vegetarian food, too, and during the day (9am to 5.30pm) you can stock up on fresh fruit and veggies.

Jeff's Pirates Cove (Map p218; ☎ 789 2683; 111 Rte 4, Ipan Talofoto; mains US\$16-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) On the east coast, this beach bar (see p236) and restaurant has a popular menu with

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Jeff's Pirates Cove (Map p218; ☎ 789 2683; www.jeffspiratescove.com; 111 Rte 4, Ipan Talofofo; ☎ lunch & dinner) This place is an oasis on the east coast, which is pretty much devoid of bars and restaurants, so its ambience is different and refreshing. The place is named after its owner, a salty, 'aaarggh-me-hearties'-type who's very much your standard local legend, and features a bar shaped like a ship's innards and an eating area that backs right out onto the beach and the Pacific Ocean for the obligatory round of sunset drinks and munchies. Jeff tells stories and sells stories (storyboards, that is; there's a good gift shop here); pump him and his buddies for info on what Guam was like in the 1970s (certainly a lot different from now, by all accounts) and check out the walls of the Cove, which are festooned with photos from the last couple of decades of island life.

Shoichi Yokoi, the Japanese soldier who hid in the jungle for 28 years after WWII ended, used to say that he could hear people laughing and singing at the Cove, and that it made him wistful for human contact.

The Cove has good food, too (see p235). Beware, though: it closes early, 6pm Monday to Saturday and 7pm Sundays.

favourites like spicy chicken *kelaguen* salad, fresh local fish, and cheeseburgers, as well as a Greek menu (US\$7 to US\$10) suitable for nibbling on at the bar: dips, gyros, falafels, salads.

Wagaya Hachi Hachi (Map p226; ☎ 647 8880; Blue Lagoon Plaza, Tumon Bay; mains US\$12-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This amiable, quiet joint serves up pretty good Korean fare, like roasted pork belly and spicy intestine. The winner, though, is the kimchee pancake, effectively a Korean pizza – hot, spicy and sloppy.

Outback Steakhouse (Map p226; ☎ 646 1543; Pacific Palace Bldg, Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; mains US\$16-20; ☎ dinner) Guam has lots of steakhouses, but the raucous, Aussie-themed Outback ('Ripper Shrimps', 'Jackaroo Chops' etc) is the standout. Besides steak in bewildering permutations (and seafood battered, crumbed and fried), the place is famous for the Bloomin' Onion appetiser – a small forest of crispy, spicy onion sticks that's billed as an 'Outback Ab-original' (hmmm...). The Outback is insanely popular and they don't take bookings, so just turn up, count on a long wait to be seated, and drink at the bar in the meantime. Thrilling news for Aussies: they serve VB beer, a welcome respite from Asahi and Budweiser, apparently the only two other brands sold on this island.

Marianas Trench (Map p226; ☎ 646 4049; North-west Plaza, Tamuning; mains US\$15-25; ☎ lunch Mon-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) This Thai restaurant has a loyal following; its recent renovations have only increased its standing, because it continues to pack 'em in more than ever. The Trench

serves traditional Thai dishes (Pad Thai, the full gamut of curries) and serves them well, in generous portions.

DRINKING

Guam used to have an outstanding beach-bar scene until the relentless resorts gobbled all the real estate up. As with sleeping and eating, most of the action is in the Tumon area; most of the big hotel bars have happy hours, usually with finger food, from 4pm to 7pm or 8pm.

Jimmy Dee's (Map p226; 646 7760; Tamuning) Run by Guamanian singer and all-round legend, Mr Jimmy Dee himself, this is a throwback to (or hold over of) the classic beach bars of yore, perched right on the sand, tucked away behind houses and offices. As you sip your booze on the hot sand and watch the tail lights flaring from cars on Marine Dr across the water, you'll be thanking your lucky stars you're not in one of the endless traffic jams that clog that particular thoroughfare. There's island dancing every Friday night and live music Saturday nights.

Old Hagåtña Bar & Grill (Map p223; ☎ 472 5885; 230 West Soledad Ave; Hagåtña) This is a lovely old-time, wood-panelled bar – classy, elegant and perfect for sippin' scotch. Whatever your poison is, you'll feel like a mover and shaker here. The restaurant (see p234) is highly recommended.

Tree Bar (Map p226; ☎ 646 1835; Hilton Guam Resort & Spa, 202 Hilton Rd, Tumon) This lively bar is frequented by off-duty pilots, expats and coachloads of Japanese tourists. It's a circular affair surrounded by palm trees and lapping water,

and features free and reasonable food during its happy hour (4pm to 7pm). There are several theme nights (like Tequila night, with appropriate Mexican food) and Chamorro dancing every night except Tuesdays. The dancing, while undoubtedly sanitised for tourists, is still bawdy and in your face and features fire twirling and machete juggling.

Mac & Marti (Map p226; ☎ 647 1879; 1st fl, Holiday Plaza Hotel, Tumon) This large, dark US-style bar features live music and a dedicated cigar room that stocks all kinds of stogies. Mac and Marti is a big hit with naval types, but you don't have to wear huge white flares, a bib, a ridiculous cap and a grudge against the army to enjoy yourself here.

Bully's (Map p226; ☎ 649 2389; Pleasure Island, Tumon) This classic American-style bar is a small, narrow, dark drinking den. George Thorogood would feel right at home here, drinking alone or with his good mates Johnny, Jimmy and Bud...and his Old Grandad.

ENTERTAINMENT Cinemas

Guam Megaplex Cinema (Map p226; ☎ 646 0360; 199 Chalan San Antonio, Tamuning) In the Guam Premium Outlets complex.

Micronesia Mall Theatre (Map p218; ☎ 647 4032; www.micronesiamall.com; Micronesia Mall, 1088 W Marine Corps Dr, Dededo)

Live Music & Performance

Mac & Marti (Map p226; ☎ 647 1879; 1st fl, Holiday Plaza Hotel, Tumon) This popular bar (above) hosts live music most nights: lightweight acoustic duos, jazz combos, alternative rock.

SandCastle Dinner Theatre (Map p226; ☎ 646 8000; www.sandcastlelguam.com; 1199 Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon) For glitz, this entertainment complex is unrivalled – it proudly boasts of hosting Las Vegas-style cabaret and dinner shows 'amidst Noritake bone china, Italian marble, and hand-cut crystal chandeliers'; Steve Wheeler, an 'ice skating illusionist', recently performed here. The SandCastle also houses the enormous Globe, with billiard tables, lounge, bar and disco. You won't get into its ritzy Manhattan Room in shorts or thongs.

SHOPPING

K-Mart (Map p226; ☎ 649 9802; ☎ 24hr) This is reputedly the world's largest K-Mart; folks from all over Micronesia travel here to stock up, and indeed, for you, the traveller,

it's perfect for finding those elusive last-minute items before travelling around the more remote Micronesian islands.

Micronesia Mall (Map p218; ☎ 647 4032; www.micronesiamall.com; 1088 W Marine Corps Dr, Dededo; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Sun) Another gigantic shrine to consumption, with department stores, food courts, beauty salons, travel agents, sporting goods, clothing boutiques and jewellers.

DFS Galleria (☎ 646 9640; Pale San Vitores Rd, Tumon; ☎ 10am-11pm) Duty-free heaven for cashed-up angels, with numerous boutique shops to choose from.

The **Shopping Bus** (☎ 632 8882), billed as 'Guam's Number One Shopping Ride', runs a 'shopping loop' shuttle between all of these fine establishments and more besides. Only in Guam... Choose from weekly (US\$10), daily (US\$6) and round-trip (US\$4) tickets.

GUAM DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

All hotels accept Visa and MasterCard and most top-end hotels charge around US\$15 return for airport transfers; smaller places tend to do it for free. Most hotel rooms

PRACTICALITIES

- Guam's excellent daily newspaper, *Pacific Daily News*, carries local, US and international news.
- *Guahan* is an interesting monthly magazine covering all aspects of island life, and includes entertainment listings.
- All hotels have cable TV including CNN.
- The video and DVD systems used in Guam are NTSC, which is the same as the US.
- Electricity is supplied at 110V, 60Hz AC and US-style two- and three-pin plugs are used.
- Like the US, Guam uses the imperial system of measurement (feet, miles and degrees Fahrenheit). We've used metric in this chapter; use the table on the Quick Reference page to convert to imperial.

have TV, phone, refrigerator, and private bathroom, and are subject to 10% tax unless otherwise noted.

ACTIVITIES

Pick up a copy of the tourist office's *General Information Brochure* for a thorough overview of places to rent surfboards, jet skis, sea kayaks and other water-sport equipment.

Boating

Marianas Paddlesports Racing Association

(☎ 649 6772) Sponsors numerous races in six-person outrigger canoes in Tumon Bay and Apra Harbor.

Marianas Yacht Club (☎ 477 3533; www.guam-online.com/myc; Apra Harbor) Sponsors several races throughout the year and supplies information about charter boats and sailing lessons.

Diving & Snorkelling

The tourist office publishes a comprehensive booklet, *Diving in Guam USA*, listing dive services and attractions in Guam.

Guam Tropical Dive Station (☎ 477 2774; www.gtds.com; Marine Dr, Anigua)

Micronesian Divers Association (☎ 472 6321/5; www.mdaguam.com; Piti)

Real World Diving Co (☎ 646 8903; www.rwdiving.com; PO Box 2800, Hagåtña) Besides 'real' diving, it also offers 'snuba diving': the air tank stays on the boat, while you, attached to an air hose, explore shallow waters.

Seawalker (Map p218; ☎ 477 3830; www.seawalker.com; 372 Marine Dr, Piti) Strap on a ridiculous-looking helmet attached to an air hose and you too can approximate a real diving experience; 'so easy', goes the claim, 'almost anyone can do it', including 'physically handicapped people in wheelchairs'.

For more information on diving in Guam, see p76.

Hiking

The **Department of Parks & Recreation** (DPR; ☎ 472 2887, 472 8197; www.admin.gov.gu/dpr/boonie/home.html; adult/child US\$2/free) sponsors guided bushwalks (called 'boonie stomps') on most Saturday mornings. The party departs from the recreation centre, next to the baseball stadium behind Chamorro Village. Transportation is not provided, so bring a hire car or a friend with wheels and dress appropriately; ring beforehand to find out what exactly you'll need to bring.

Submarining

Atlantis Submarine (Map p218; ☎ 477 4166; www.atlantisadventures.com; 319 Aqua World Marina, Piti; adult/child US\$82/42) Does a 45-minute dive of Gab Gab Reef II in Apra Harbor.

Nautilus Guam (Map p218; ☎ 646 8331; www.adventureguam.com; adult/child US\$45/20) Semisubmersible vessel that also tours Apra Harbor.

more well known. Certainly, Malojloj is among the more colourful: lasting for three days, it features hot-pepper contests and carabao (water buffalo) racing in the streets around the San Isidro church.

January Asan, Tumon, Chalan Pago, Mongmong

February Maina, Yigo

March Inarajan

April Barrigada, Agaña Gumas, Merizo

May Malojloj (Inarajan), Santa Rita

June Chalan Pago, Toto, Tamuning, Ordot

July Agat

August Tamuning, Piti, Barrigada, Agat, Canada-Barrigada

September Hagåtña, Anigua, Talofofo, Mangilao

October Yona, Umatat, Sinajana

November Agaña Heights, Dededo

December Santa Rita

FIESTA!

Each of Guam's 19 villages hosts an annual fiesta honouring its patron saint. These Catholic-inspired, community affairs begin with a Saturday evening Mass in the local church and proceed with a procession around the village, carrying a statue of the saint, followed by a buffet feast in the church hall. The festivities continue on Sunday, when groups of friends gather in private houses.

The idea is to attract as many people as possible to the festivities, so everyone is welcome.

Fiestas are celebrated on the weekend closest to the saint's feast day so the dates vary a bit each year; consult with the Guam visitor information centre (p222) for exact dates.

The largest fiesta is Hagåtña's, and the Malojloj fiesta in Inarajan is also one of the

BUSINESS HOURS

Regular banking hours are 10am to 3pm Monday to Thursday, 10am to 6pm Friday, and 9am to noon Saturday.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Guam is under US embassy jurisdiction.

Embassies & Consulates in Guam

Federated States of Micronesia (☎ 646 9154/6; PO Box 10630, Suite 613, Tamuning)

France (☎ 649 7277; PO Box 9819, Tamuning)

Japan (☎ 646 5220; ITC Bldg, Marine Dr, Tamuning)

Korea (Map p223; ☎ 472 3097; 305 GCIC Bldg, Hagåtña)

Marianas/Guam Liaison Office (☎ 646 9181/2; PO Box 8366, Tamuning)

Nauru (☎ 649 7106; PO Box 2354, Hagåtña)

New Zealand (☎ 646 7662; PO Box 10989, Tamuning)

Palau (☎ 646 9281/2; PO Box 9457, Tamuning)

Philippines (☎ 646 4620/30; PO Box 9880, Tamuning)

Taipei (☎ 472 5866; PO Box 3416, Hagåtña)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Guam Discovery Day First Monday in March. Marks Magellan's landing, celebrated at Umatat with a re-enactment of the landing, as well as cultural dances, sports, arts and crafts and *tuba* (coconut wine) making.

Liberation Day 21 July. Feasts, fireworks and, along Marine Pde, the year's largest parade.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Guam Diner (www.guamdiner.com) Lists (probably) every restaurant on the island, but be warned that objectivity is in short supply (ie the reviewers like everything).
Guam Visitors Bureau (www.visitguam.org) Useful tourist information.

Guampedia (www.guampedia.com) Aims to be a comprehensive cultural guide to Guam – its history, people and arts. It's currently in the early stages, but keep checking back for further developments and more comprehensive entries.

MONEY

A tip of 10% to 15% is expected. See the Quick Reference page for exchange rates.

TIME

The time in Guam is GMT/UTC + 10.

VISAS

All non-US citizens need a US visa to visit Guam, except Canadians and anyone who's eligible for Guam's visa-waiver program. Visa waivers allow citizens of the following countries to enter Guam visa-free for

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper:** US\$1
- **Coffee:** US\$2
- **Taxi ride from the airport to Tumon:** US\$10
- **Car hire:** from US\$40 per day
- **Internet access:** US\$8 per hour

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon of petrol:** US\$3
- **1L water:** US\$1.50
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** 80c
- **Souvenir t-shirt:** US\$22
- **Hot dog:** US\$3

15 days maximum (no extensions; travel onwards to other US points is not allowed, except for citizens of Japan and the UK): Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong (Chinese with British passport), Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, Vanuatu and Western Samoa.

TRANSPORT IN GUAM

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

A B Won Pat International Airport (☎ 0800 1700; www.guamairport.com) in Guam is the hub for Micronesian travel.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM GUAM

All Nippon Airways (☎ 642 5555; www.ana.co.jp)

China Airlines (☎ 649 0860; www.china-airlines.com)

Continental (☎ 647 6453; www.continental.com; Rte 14, Tamuning)

Freedom Air (☎ 649 2294; www.freedom-air.net)

Japan Airlines (☎ 646 9195; www.jal.co.jp)

Korean Air (☎ 642 3216; www.koreanair.com)

Northwest Airlines (☎ 649 1665; www.nwa.com)

Philippine Airlines (☎ 632 1617; www.philippineairlines.com)

Sea

Apra Harbor is the only port of entry for Guam. Yachties should contact the **Marianas Yacht Club** (☎ 477 3533; Apra Harbor).

GETTING AROUND

Public transport is limited; your best bet for seeing the island is to hire a car.

To/From the Airport

There are car-hire booths and taxis at the airport. Many of the hotels provide airport transport for free, or a nominal amount; the upmarket hotels charge around US\$15 return.

Bicycle

Bicycling is dangerous and not recommended – on Guam's main roads there's hardly any room for pedestrians, let alone bicycles.

Bus

Guam Mass Transit Authority (☎ 475 4682) operates a limited public bus system. The most useful route is from Hagåtña to Tamuning, Tumon Bay and the Micronesia Mall; another line runs between Hagåtña and Agat; and another between Hagåtña and the University of Guam.

Buses run approximately every hour from 5.30am to 7.30pm from Monday to Saturday (US\$1/3 per ride/day), although frequencies can be erratic and inconsistent.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

If you're on Guam for more than 30 days, you'll need to get a local driving licence.

Bring your home licence, US\$5 and half a brain (to pass the written test) to the **Department of Revenue & Taxation, Motor Vehicle Division** (☎ 475 5000; Rte 8, Barrigada).

HIRE

Budget (☎ 647 1446), **Hertz** (☎ 646 5875), **National** (☎ 649 0110), **Toyota** (☎ 642 3200), **Avis** (☎ 646 8156) and **Nissan** (☎ 632 7300) all have rental booths at the airport. Optional collision damage waiver (CDW) is available and most companies will deliver cars to your hotel at no extra cost. Tamuning Plaza Hotel operates a very reasonable car-hire service; the Harmon Loop Hotel has good deals, too.

ROAD RULES

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road. The speed limit is 35 mph unless otherwise posted.

Local Transport

TAXI

Fares start at US\$1.80 on flag fall. It's US\$3 for the first 1.6km and US\$0.60 for each 400m thereafter. The meters are also time-based: they'll keep ticking as the built-in timer charges US\$0.60 for every two minutes of your journey. It costs US\$1 to transport each piece of heavy luggage. From Tumon Bay it costs about US\$10 to catch a taxi to the airport or to Micronesia Mall, and it costs US\$15 to US\$20 to go to the Agaña Shopping Center. A 10% tip is customary.

Call **Peace Taxi Service** (☎ 646 1515).

Kiribati

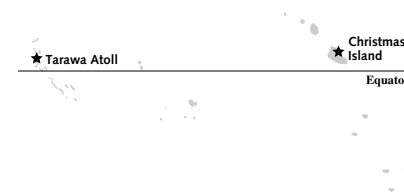
Curving its way above and below the equator, the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced 'Kiribas') encompasses the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands, and was known under British rule as the Gilbert Islands. Measured by land size Kiribati is a tiny nation of just over 810 sq km, but its 33 atolls span a huge 3.5 million sq km of the Pacific. Most atolls surround turquoise lagoons and barely rise above the surrounding ocean, so it's rare to be out of the sight and sound of the sea.

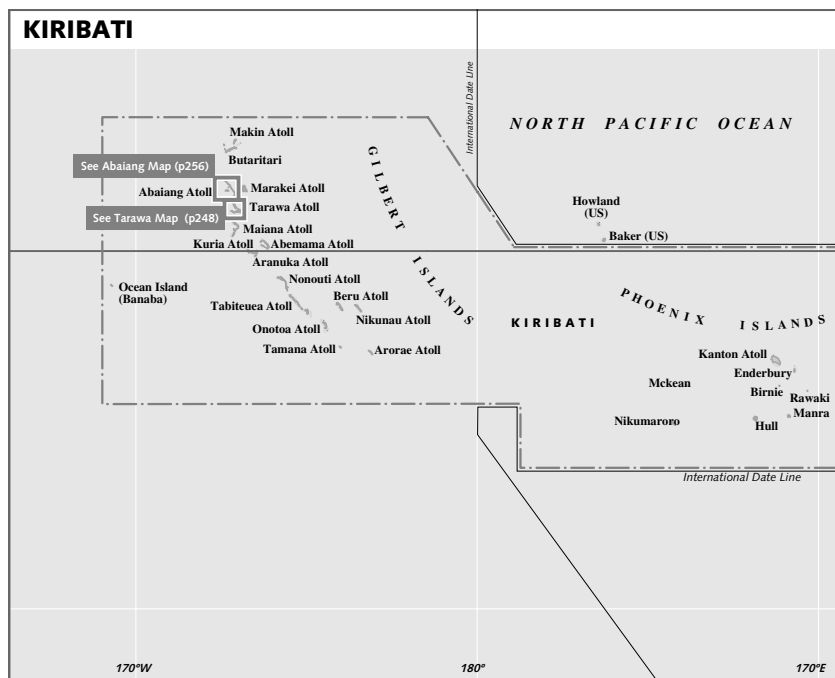
Kiribati's recent colonial and WWII history has had little impact on the outer islands, where the people subsist on coconuts, breadfruit and fish as they have done for centuries. Even on the main island, Tarawa, most locals live in traditional raised thatched huts. Western influence is increasing, though, in the form of cars, bars, movies and the Internet, and inevitably there's an escalating urban drift from the outer islands to Tarawa.

The people of the islands are known as I-Kiribati. Wide-eyed children may chirp a bold '*mauri*' (hello) to passing strangers, while their elders tend towards a laconic raise of an eyebrow in greeting. Nothing happens fast here, so wind down, relax and enjoy living on island time.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Relax with a fresh coconut in one of North Tarawa's **homestays** (p253) on stilts beside the aqua lagoon
- Tour **WWII relics** (p250) from the bloody 1943 Battle of Tarawa
- Watch – and participate! – in colourful and vibrant traditional **dancing** (p245)
- Live the relaxed **outer islands** (p255) lifestyle, gathering coconuts, salting clams or weaving thatch
- Fish for bonefish or watch the astonishing birdlife on **Christmas Island** (p259)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Kiribati is always hot and steamy, but its equatorial proximity means that it's out of the way of cyclones. Butaritari consistently has the highest annual rainfall (around 300cm) in the Gilbert Islands, while Washington Island in the Line Islands gets a staggering 750cm annually. Christmas Island is generally drier and less humid.

HISTORY

The first settlers arrived in the Gilbert Islands over 3000 years ago, most likely from the Caroline and Marshall Islands. The Phoenix and Line Islands never supported permanent settlements, although archaeological evidence suggests occasional pre-European landings.

The early Gilbertese settled in distinct *kainga* (villages), and except in northern Butaritari and Makin Atoll, where centralised chiefs governed, each *kainga* had a *man-eaba* (meeting house). Most communities also had a *bangota*, a shrine to ancestral gods. The I-Kiribati were fierce warriors, known for their sharp shark-tooth spears,

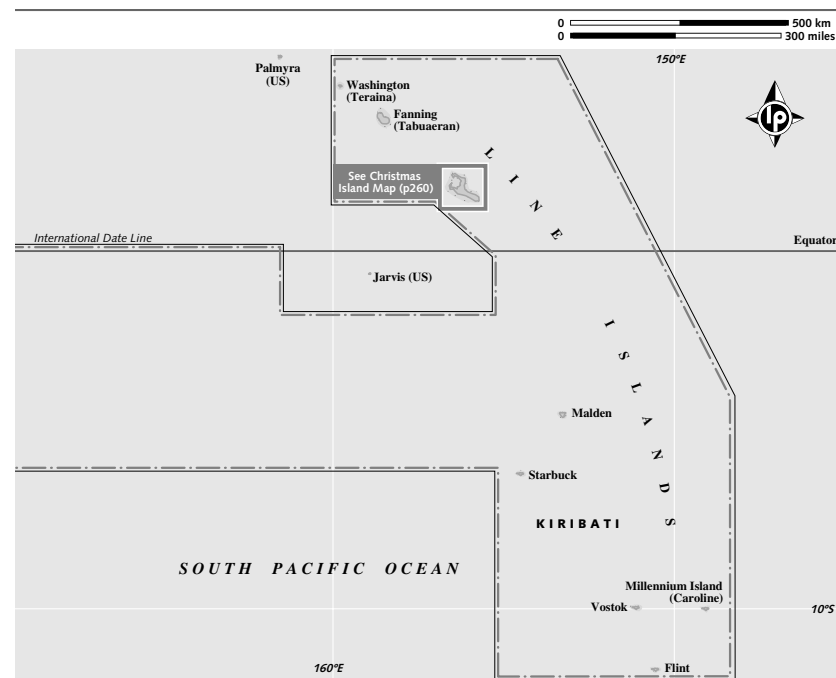
and they fought bloody inter-island battles clad in effective coconut-fibre body armour.

European Contact

Because of its isolation, Kiribati was largely bypassed by the early explorers. Spaniard Pedro Fernández de Quirós landed briefly in 1606, after which there are no records

KIRIBATI FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Tarawa (Tarawa Atoll)
- **Population:** 96,000
- **Land Area:** 811 sq km
- **Number of atolls:** 33
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 686
- **Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$)
- **Languages:** English and Kiribati
- **Greeting:** *Mauri* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.visit-kiribati.com



until Commodore John Byron put ashore at Nikunau Atoll in 1766. In 1788 Captain Thomas Gilbert sailed past and recorded several more of the atolls that make up the island group that bears his name.

During the 19th century a scattering of whalers, traders and missionaries made their way to the Gilberts. Butaritari was the main trading port, where manufactured goods were swapped for coconut oil and turtle shell. Blackbirders moved in during the late 1800s, taking islanders to work on plantations in Fiji, Australia and Hawai'i.

British Rule

After some years of informal British involvement in the islands, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were declared a British protectorate on 27 May 1892 – the Ellice Islands make up present-day Tuvalu (see p732). Three years later Tarawa became the administrative capital because of its wide lagoon passage and good anchorage.

In 1900 geologist Albert Ellis of the Pacific Islands Company (later renamed the

British Phosphate Commission) discovered that unclaimed Banaba (p257) was loaded with high-grade phosphate – 20 million tons of it. He coerced the Banabans into giving away mining rights to the island for 999 years and mining operations swiftly commenced. The British folded Banaba (then known as Ocean Island) into the protectorate in 1901, and the administrative capital was moved there in 1908; Tarawa regained its status as the capital after WWII.

In 1916 the protectorate became a fully fledged colony. Christmas Island and other Line Islands were added in 1919, and the Phoenix Islands joined in 1937.

World Wars

WWI largely bypassed the Gilberts, and on Banaba phosphate mining continued undisturbed. WWII, on the other hand, brought heavy bloodshed.

A few days after attacking Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japan bombed Banaba and also took Butaritari, Makin and Tarawa. In mid-1942 US marines raided

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE

Being a visitor to Kiribati is hard work, but it can be rich and rewarding once you're past the (literally) hot-and-bothered stage.

Tourism, where it exists at all, is in its infancy here; in fact, as the locals don't really understand why tourists want to visit or what they want to see or do, even the notion of tourism is a bit weird. This, combined with a natural I-Kiribati reticence in the company of strangers, makes it easy for visitors to feel out of place. You'll need to take responsibility for your own enjoyment, but when you show what you're interested in, or say what you want to do, people are usually only too pleased to make it happen.

So, for example, don't worry about lack of language; go over and talk to the toddy-gatherers, or wade out and join a family net-fishing at high tide. Stop, hover and smile when you hear singing and dancing at a *maneaba*; someone's likely to invite you in. If you want to go out on a boat, ask around locally and you'll probably find yourself becoming part of a family outing on the lagoon. If you need other 'outsider' company from time to time, you'll find that most visitors to Kiribati are overseas workers – development workers, diplomatic staff and contractors – who have formed small social networks; drop into one of the high commissions or bars and you'll soon find them.

Kiribati is a place for flexible travellers who can cope with a bit of discomfort and aren't too hung up on organised itineraries and punctuality. You need to be prepared to drink beer and eat fish and rice, instead of drinking gin and tonics followed by a three-course evening meal, but you'll find the sunset is just as beautiful.

Butaritari, forcing the Japanese to flee before pulling out a few days later. Japanese reprisals against both Gilbertese and Europeans throughout the islands were harsh, and Betio, one of Tarawa's islets, became a reinforced concrete stronghold. By 1943 there was a Japanese airfield in Betio, and a seaplane base on Butaritari.

In November 1943 Operation Galvanic saw 5000 US marines attack Betio. After three days of bloody fighting, the marines gained the beaches but lost 1500 men. While the Battle of Tarawa was not of lasting strategic importance, its main contribution was to demonstrate the effectiveness of the amphibious tractors – amtracs – that were used during the battle. Many war relics can still be seen at Betio (p250).

Independence

Kiribati's independence movement gathered momentum in the 1960s, along with those of the Solomon Islands and Fiji. A series of governing structures based on a Westminster-style parliamentary system were gradually instituted, culminating in an elected House of Representatives (1967) and House of Assembly (1974). On 12 July 1979, a year after the secession of the Ellice Islands, the Republic of Kiribati (consisting of the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands)

became an independent nation, ending 87 years of British rule.

Kiribati is a member of the British Commonwealth and was admitted to the UN in 1999. The 41-member Maneaba ni Maungatabu (House of Parliament) is popularly elected every four years, as is the *beretitenti* (president). Island councils control local government, working closely with the *unimane* (village elders).

It was a cruel – perhaps calculated – irony that the new nation's independence coincided with the exhaustion of Banaba's rich phosphate reserves. Before independence, phosphate mining on Banaba accounted for 45% of Kiribati's GDP and 85% of its exports.

Since then copra has become Kiribati's principal export, almost all of it going to Bangladesh where it is used in the manufacture of cosmetics. Kiribati's principal asset is the 3.5 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which earns the country almost A\$3 million annually from foreign fishing licences. About 1700 I-Kiribati seamen work on foreign (mostly German) vessels and send back money to their families. Tourism is marginal, except on Christmas Island and more recently on Fanning Island, where a head-fee for cruise-ship passengers brings in over A\$1 million annually.

MANEABA

Found throughout Kiribati, *maneaba* (traditional meeting houses) have sloping thatched roofs (or, more recently, corrugated iron) and locally woven floor mats. Typically the largest building in the village, the *maneaba* is a place of strict social hierarchy during meetings and community events, and commands great respect. By design, the pointed roof of the *maneaba* drops below an adult's height, so you must duck respectfully to enter.

The *unimane*, or old men, sit cross-legged in the centre of the building and conduct the meeting; they are always served food before everyone else. If you are invited to enter a *maneaba*, you will be expected to participate by giving a speech and/or singing a song; prepare your best patriotic melodies. *Maneaba* are now often used on South Tarawa to accommodate groups of church or community visitors; elsewhere, people sleep in the *maneaba* only on special occasions.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Cultural traditions remain deeply embedded in the I-Kiribati, despite their embrace of many Western influences. The thud of pop music may blare from homes and minibuses, but likewise the thump of feet practising traditional dances and some fantastic singing emanate from *maneaba* across the country. The cash economy is still relatively new, and people live for the day rather than plan for the future, relying on strong ties with extended family for support. Islanders have a tradition of hospitality, and though lack of common language can make them shy, it doesn't stop the children from giggling and chirping '*Mauri i-Matang*' (Hello stranger!) at every opportunity.

Lifestyle

Most I-Kiribati on the outer islands maintain a largely subsistence lifestyle and live in cool, weatherproof houses (usually variations of a raised platform with screened open sides and a thatched roof). Life here continues pretty much as it always has: people collect toddy and fetch drinking water; they go fishing and preserve the catch for sale by salting or smoking; they cut and make thatch; and they dry coconut for copra. In the heat of the day, you'll see people sitting in the shade mending fishing nets and weaving mats, or snoozing and chatting in groups on hammocks. Even in crowded South Tarawa, a modified traditional lifestyle continues in family compounds where, for example, spare parts for motorbikes sit beside piles of just-woven thatch, and cut-down 44-gallon drums become fire-pits above which flying fish are hung to dry at the side of the road.

Population

Kiribati's population pressure is severe, as there's an average of 4.5 children per family. An internal resettlement programme is shifting people from overcrowded South Tarawa to the Phoenix and northern Line Islands, particularly Christmas Island.

RELIGION

I-Kiribati are split fairly evenly between the Roman Catholic Church and the (Congregationalist) Kiribati Protestant Church. Other faiths, including Baha'i, Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons, are represented.

ARTS

Typical I-Kiribati crafts include wooden baskets, mats and conical fishermen's hats made out of pandanus, carved outrigger canoes, woven bags and purses, and necklaces of fibres and shells. Most are made on the outer islands and shipped to Tarawa.

Dance

Kiribati's colourful, rhythmic chants and dances are one of the highlights of Micronesia, and dance remains an important part of local culture. Regular dance performances are held at the region's two largest hotels: on Tarawa the Otintai Hotel (p253) and the Captain Cook Hotel (p261) on Christmas Island.

Literature

There's no tradition of local writing but several visitors have written accounts of their stays in the islands.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the early master of Pacific writing, visited several of the Gilbert Islands in the late 19th century; you'll find those accounts in the widely available

THE MEDIUM & THE MESSAGE

Down an alleyway and upstairs in a building behind the bank in Bairiki, the office of A Nei Tabera Ni Kai (p248) is chaotically welcoming. The business of this small, not-for-profit organisation is community development through documentary and drama. With funding from several international donor agencies, the enthusiastic local film crew and cast make movies about issues affecting I-Kiribati.

One of the most successful movies is a drama about urban drift which follows two young friends as they move from an outer island to the bright lights of Tarawa. The film reveals their (mostly unhappy) experiences as they learn to live in a cash economy, look for work and get their first taste of alcohol abuse and sexual violence, before they eventually decide that life was better before and return home. The film was taken on tour to the outer islands, and one community watched it again and again until the generator ran out of fuel overnight! Documentaries on health issues are an effective means of relaying the importance of breastfeeding, for example, or safe sex and the use of condoms. It's a great way to deliver messages in what is mostly a culture that doesn't read, and the use of local language, locations and situations strengthens their impact.

A Nei Tabera Ni Kai also produces some souvenir videos in English, covering local WWII sites and stories, Kiribati culture and history (the millennium celebrations looked sensational!).

Robert Louis Stevenson – *His Best Pacific Writings*, compiled by Roger Robinson. They're a window on to both how much and how little has changed.

A *Pattern of Islands* by Arthur Grimble remains a classic account of the islands during the British colonial era. It's a book of its time, but Grimble was an exceptional colonial officer (he was in the islands for almost 20 years from 1914) who clearly loved the islands and their culture. His account of being traditionally tattooed – a practice that no longer exists in Kiribati – is extraordinary.

Fijian writer Daryl Tarte's *Islands of the Frigate Bird* is a fictionalised account of the settlement of Kiribati and the effects of colonisation in general and phosphate mining on Banaba in particular; it's the only novel of its kind.

Despite the misleading title, J Maarten Troost's *The Sex Lives of Cannibals* is an irreverent and often very funny account of his two-year stint as a house-husband on Tarawa in the 1990s. The book is deeply unpopular with locals, and by reading it you'll learn more about one expat's life rather than the life of I-Kiribati.

Inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson, Pamela Stephenson made her own ocean voyage in 2005 and wrote *Treasure Islands – Sailing the South Seas in the wake of Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson*. It's not riveting reading, but there are some interesting Kiribati cameos among the islands-less-travelled, and yachties will enjoy the nautical flavour.

Painting

Look for the artwork of Teweiariki Teaero, an I-Kiribati artist who illustrated Daryl Tarte's novel *Islands of the Frigate Bird*. You're more likely to see his work in the Oceania Arts Centre in Suva, Fiji, than in Kiribati.

LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Kiribati, but the indigenous language, also called Kiribati, predominates. Even on South Tarawa many locals know only a smattering of English.

The most difficult aspect of pronunciation concerns the letters 'ti' at the end of a word; they should be pronounced 's' – which is why Kiribati is pronounced 'kiri-bas', and Kiritimati 'Christmas'.

The name Kiribati is a transliteration of Gilberts, after the British name for the islands. Older locals sometimes refer to the Gilbert chain by its original name, Tungaru.

Gilbertese basics

Hello.	<i>Maui.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tia bo.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ko uara?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>I marurung (ko raba).</i>
Please.	<i>Taaoka or bubuti.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Ko raba.</i>
Yes.	<i>Eng.</i>
No.	<i>Tiaki.</i>

ENVIRONMENT Geography

Kiribati's oceans stretch 3870km from east to west. The country is composed of three main island groups: the 16 atolls of the Gilbert Islands chain, north of Fiji; the eight atolls of the Phoenix Islands, southeast of the Gilberts; and the Line Islands chain, further east. Banaba, 400km west of the main Gilberts chain, is a raised coral atoll. The other islands are flat coral atolls with central lagoons and long, spindly islands. The Line and Gilbert Islands are split by the equator; the Phoenix Islands lie just south of it.

Ecology

Coral atolls are fragile environments (see the boxed text, p63), with a shallow freshwater 'lens' lying just below the surface. They can support hardy plants like coconut and breadfruit but not plants – or big numbers of people – that require a constant supply of freshwater. Increasing population pressure means that that water is being used and polluted faster than the water lens can cope with.

Rising sea levels have mildly eroded some atolls (see the boxed text, p66), and coral bleaching, pollution and overfishing have degraded many reefs. The lagoon is used as a latrine and rubbish dump, and in highly populated Tarawa it has extremely high levels of bacteria; a successful waste disposal and recycling programme called *kaoki mange* is helping to address this issue. Elsewhere the islands' lagoons remain a rich and beautiful marine resource.

Until recently Christmas Island had one of the largest groupings of seabirds in the tropics, possibly in the world, estimated at 25 million birds of 18 species. The resettlement of several thousands of migrants from Tarawa has already caused a noticeable decline in both bird numbers and marine life.

TARAWA ATOLL

pop 41,000 / area 64 sq km

Shaped like a two-sided triangle, Tarawa Atoll is the administrative centre of Kiribati. The atoll is divided into North and South Tarawa; the south is the locus of all government activity and services, while the rural north approximates an outer-island experience. South Tarawa is home to more than a third of Kiribati's population, most of whom live clustered in open-sided huts on the islet of Betio at the westernmost tip of the atoll. Betio was the site of a bloody victory over the Japanese by US marines in 1943; it still has huge guns along its beaches and rusting tanks just offshore.

South Tarawa is hot, noisy and chaotic, but don't be overwhelmed. Look a little closer and it's also vibrant and friendly, with many I-Kiribati retaining modified traditional lifestyles in the face of continuing urban drift.

ORIENTATION

A system of causeways links Betio with Buota in South Tarawa, a distance of about 35km along a narrow sealed road. Bairiki,

A DATE WITH HISTORY

The International Date Line has moved many times since early European circumnavigators of the globe complained of losing a day on the trip.

The Date Line used to split Kiribati down the middle – until 1 January 1995 when the Republic of Kiribati (quite legally) shifted part of the Date Line eastward. The stated purpose of the move was to unite Kiribati's dispersed atolls on the same side of the Date Line. Previously, when it was Friday on Christmas Island, it was already Saturday on Tarawa.

In the run-up to 2000, this move propelled tiny Kiribati onto the cutting edge of global millennium fever. Being so far east, Kiribati's Line Islands simultaneously start each new day (and, therefore, each new year) one full hour before anyone else, and a special BBC/AAPT link ensured that Kiribati's millennium celebrations were beamed worldwide.

However, because of the earth's tilt, Kiribati doesn't always see the first sunrise. The first spot of land to see the sun rise each New Year's morning is near Victor Bay on the Antarctic coast. Caroline Island (recently renamed Millennium Island and where the celebrations took place), one of Kiribati's uninhabited southern Line Islands, is the second land to see the sunrise.

between Bikenibeu and Betio, has the majority of the government buildings. The airport is at Bonriki, on the eastern tip of South Tarawa, about an hour's drive from Betio.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Telecom Services Kiribati Ltd (TSKL; Map p249; ☎ 20 702; tskl@tskl.net.ki; Bairiki; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) The only public Internet access on Tarawa; you can also make phone calls here.

Medical Services

Tarawa Hospital (Map p248; ☎ 28 097, emergency 999) The hospital is near the airport. There's no public pharmacy on Tarawa.

Money

ANZ Bank (Map p249; ☎ 21 095) The main branch is in Bairiki, with branches in Betio and Bikenibeu. All have ATMs.

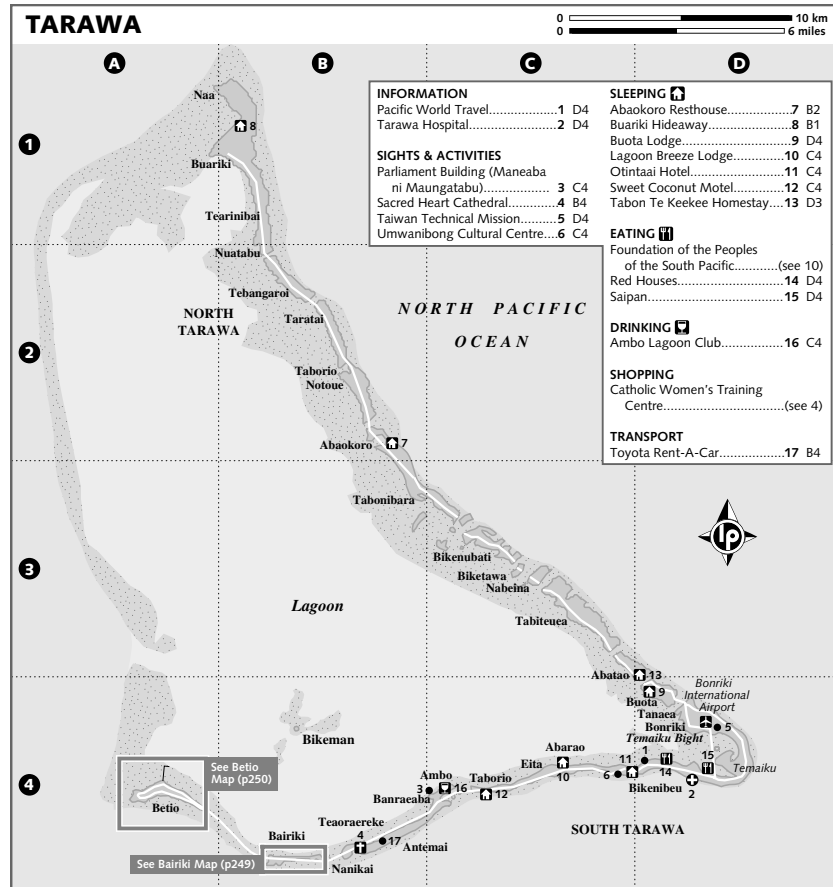
Post

Post office (Map p249) The main post office is in Bairiki, with branches in Betio and Bikenibeu. The philatelic office is attached to the post office in Betio (Map p250).

Tourist Information

A Nei Tabera Ni Kai (Map p249; ☎ 21 747; kirivid@hotmail.com) Run by Linda Uaan and John Anderson (see the boxed text, p246), who can provide information on the outer islands.

Visitor information centre (Map p250; ☎ 26 003; sto@mict.gov.ki) Next to the post office in Betio, the office has details of private shipping companies that serve the outer islands.



Travel Agencies

Pacific World Travel (☎ 28 715, 90 369; www.kiribati.holidays.com) Just past the Otintai Hotel towards Bikenibeu, Pacific World is the Air Nauru agent and can help with outer-island air and accommodation bookings.

Tobaraoi Travel (Map p250; ☎ 26 567; www.tobaraoi.com) Above the ANZ Bank in Betio, this company handles outbound travel. It's the partner agency to Pacific World Travel.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tarawa's airport is in Bonriki, about an hour's drive from Betio. The domestic airline, **Air Kiribati** (Map p249; ☎ 21 550, 21 227; www.kiritours.com; Tarawa), has an agent in Bairiki's shopping arcade; see p255 for details of scheduled services, and allow yourself plenty of leeway between your schedule and theirs. For international flight information see p264.

BOAT

A privately run, fast-service **Supercat** (☎ 22 538), based in Betio, started operation in 2005. Its schedule is somewhat erratic, but when we visited it was servicing Maiana, Kuria and Abemama to the south of Tarawa, and Abaiang, Marakei, Butaritari and Makin to the north. Sample fares include Tarawa to Abemama A\$40, and Tarawa to Butaritari A\$55.

If the Supercat breaks down it can take a while to get spare parts, so it's best to have

an alternative transport option in mind if you're on a tight timetable.

Kiribati Shipping Services Ltd (KSSL; Map p250; ☎ 26 195; kssl@tskl.net.ki) sends supply and passenger ships to service most of the outer islands at roughly monthly intervals. From Betio, sample fares are Abaiang A\$7, Maiana A\$15, Abemama A\$33, and Tab North A\$39. KSSL can also provide information about the irregular services between Kiribati and Fiji and Tuvalu.

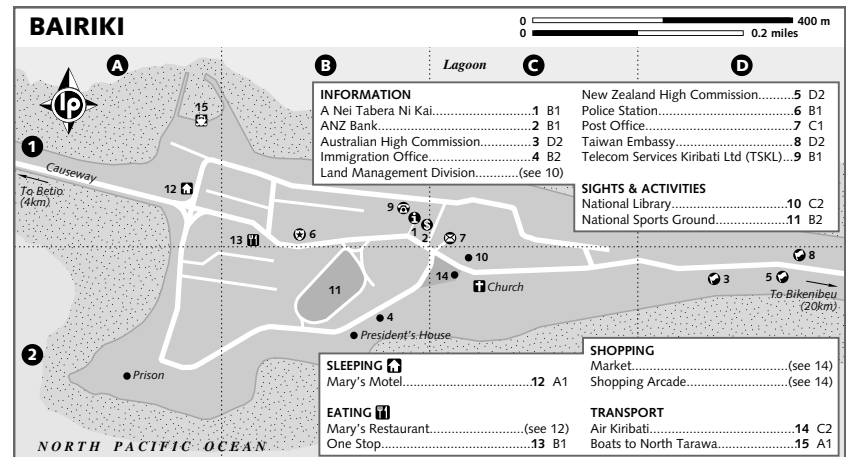
Visiting yachts can anchor in Betio Harbour for a fee of A\$2.

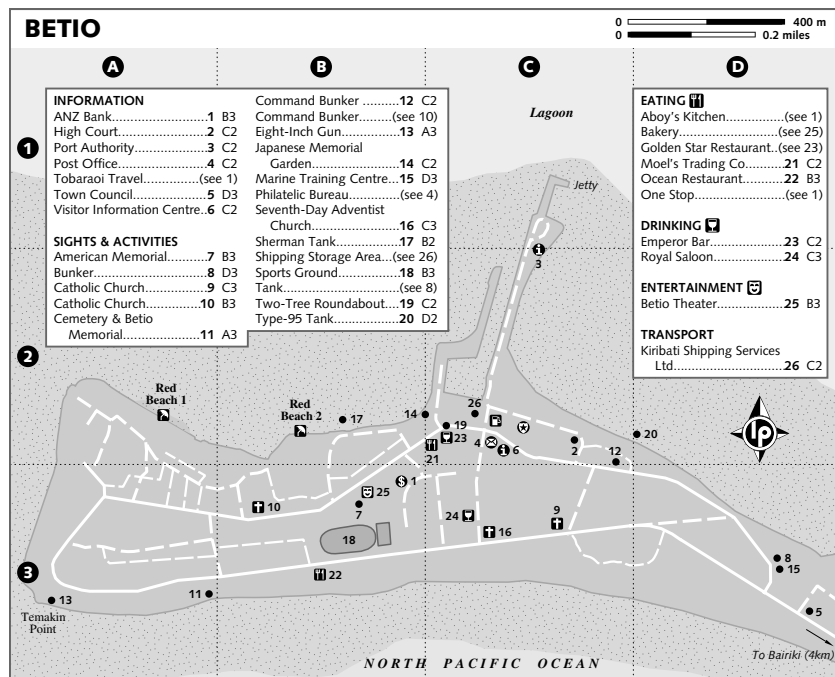
Getting Around

Tarawa's one main road extends the length of South Tarawa – the islets are linked by causeways – and into the southern tip of North Tarawa at Buota. From there you can catch a canoe ferry to North Tarawa at high tide (a five-minute, 50c trip; holler and someone will paddle across and collect you), or walk across at low tide. North Tarawa's islets are connected by causeways and are accessible by canoe or at low tide on foot. There are a few trucks and motorbikes on the bigger islets.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels will arrange a transfer. If you're hiring a car ask for it to be waiting at the airport. Public minibuses run from the airport along the length of South Tarawa (A\$1.50). They are invariably crowded, so your baggage will travel on your knee. There are no taxis.





BOAT

Several boats head off to various villages on North Tarawa from the wharf behind Mary's Restaurant in Bairiki at 3pm most days, returning next morning at 8am; a one-way trip is A\$3. Private boats sometimes motor between North and South Tarawa; ask around. A charter boat between South and North Tarawa costs around A\$120 return.

BUS

Tarawa's bus system is excellent; minivans blaring loud music and sporting a cardboard 'BUS' sign whiz by between about 6am and 9pm (A\$1.50 maximum fare). There are no real stops; just flag down a bus and shout 'i-kai' when you want to get off, and the doorkeeper will take your money. You'll rarely wait more than a few minutes before catching one.

CAR

Cars are available from **Toyota Rent-A-Car** (Map p248; ☎ 21 090; fax 21 451; Antemai) from A\$60 a day. Most hotels will be able to find a hire car for you, but check that you'll be covered by third-party insurance.

Be wary of Tarawa's dreaded speed bumps; they're positioned at regular (and usually unsigned) intervals along the narrow road, blending invisibly into its surface. They've slashed the accident rate, but you'll find yourself cursing them. If you're driving back and forth from Betio, keep a stash of coins handy to pay the 20c toll on the Betio causeway.

SIGHTS

Umwaniwong Cultural Centre

The **cultural centre** (Map p248; Bikenibeu; admission A\$2.50; ☎ Mon-Fri) has a small and dusty display of local artefacts such as coconut-fibre torso armour and lethal shark's-tooth weapons. There's a selection of mats showing different weaving patterns, and a display of coconut-rope tie techniques used in *maneaba* construction. Behind the front desk are a few Pacific reference books that you're welcome to browse through.

War Relics

On 20 November 1943, 20,000 US marines stormed Betio's beaches and after several days of bloody fighting proclaimed victory.

It came at a heavy price though: 1113 marines were killed and 2290 wounded, and the Japanese lost close to 4500 men.

Relics from the Battle of Tarawa are scattered through the atoll. Time and tide have left some beached on the shore or stranded at the low-water line; others – bunkers, guns, transport vehicles – have become embedded into family compounds, and are overrun by children, pigs and chickens.

On the ocean-side of the causeway in Betio, the first of many **bunkers** edge the road. The curved ones, made of rammed earth, are for munitions; boxy ones are for personnel. An **eight-inch gun** lies toppled in the water. Look to the right just before you reach the Town Council offices and in the garden of one of the houses you'll see a mounted rusting **75mm gun** pointing to the water.

Continue west along the ocean road and head to the **cemetery**. In the centre, among gravestones and bunkers, is the simple and imposing **Betio Memorial**. One side commemorates the people of the islands who died or suffered under the Japanese; the other is in remembrance of 22 New Zealanders and British, mostly coast watchers, who were executed on 15 October 1942. Among the names on the memorial you'll see that of the Reverend A Sadd, a missionary who was killed along with the others; his wristwatch is on display at the cultural centre in Bikenibeu.

Another eight-inch gun, inscribed in Japanese, occupies **Temakin Point**; it's only about 50m off the road but may be obscured by coconut palms or squatters' huts, so you'll probably need to ask for directions.

Continue north along the road to **Red Beach 1** and **Red Beach 2**, on the lagoon side, where the marines landed. Your best look-out point is from the sea wall at the back of the health centre, where at low tide you can see a **Sherman tank** disintegrating in the water.

The **American Memorial** is behind the Betio Theater; a dirt track leads to it, beside a couple of buildings to the right of the theatre. The memorial contains a time capsule, scheduled to be opened on 29 November 2043, exactly 100 years after the Battle of Tarawa; the memorial *may* be relocated when the upgraded sports ground opens in 2006. Continue east and turn left at the

two-tree roundabout; tucked in immediately on your left is the unkempt **Japanese Memorial Garden**, with its Shinto and Korean shrines.

Another imposing **bunker** is in the back garden of the police station. A little further along the back road, look out to the lagoon and you'll see a **Type-95 Japanese light tank**. Further along, sandwiched between the back road and the main road, is the Japanese **command bunker**; 300 bodies were found here after the battle.

Down a track beside the Marine Training Centre is a yellow-painted **bunker** – more recently used as a squash court – and, in the cluster of houses behind it, there's a bougainvillea-covered **five-inch gun** which in 2005 still contained live ordnance waiting to be defused; the local kids know to keep well clear.

To really make sense of what you're seeing – and to ensure you don't inadvertently miss something or go where you shouldn't – John Brown of **Molly's Tours** (☎ /fax 26 409; jaybe@tskl.net.ki) leads a good half-day war-relics tour (adult A\$30; minimum two people), culminating in a 15-minute battle video; his wife Molly then provides some cultural insights. Be prepared for a beer and a good yarn.

ACTIVITIES

Fishing

Steve Hendry is the contact for the **Betio Game Fishing Club** (☎ 21 184; www.fishos.com), which holds a monthly fishing competition. **Joe Teneako** (☎ 21 472, mobile 90 040) and **Derek Andrawartha** (☎ 26 168) can help with boat charters for fishing; expect to pay around A\$15 per nautical mile.

Swimming & Snorkelling

Don't expect to loll on a white beach or swim in a turquoise lagoon in South Tarawa; they're both used as a latrine by an ever-growing population, and the water's *E.coli* count is seriously high. Away from the densely settled areas – pretty much anywhere that's not South Tarawa, in fact – it's fine to swim and there's some decent snorkelling (more fish than coral), particularly at the northern tip of North Tarawa. If you must swim in the south, head for the bridge on Betio causeway or for the channels on either side of Buota; there's

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

In April 1944, afraid that the graves they'd dug on the orders of the Japanese were to be their own, seven young men from Nikunau, south of Tarawa, hurriedly gathered a few coconuts and escaped in three canoes. One canoe became separated, but the other two went on.

Days went by, and their sails were destroyed by bad weather. With a feather bait they caught and dried fish, used coconut shells to collect rainwater, sometimes caught sharks and drank their blood.

Weeks went by, and another canoe drifted away. One of the two young men remaining disappeared when the final canoe capsized. Righting it, the lone survivor, Nabetari, found himself alone on the ocean.

Months went by, and in November 1944, almost eight months after leaving Nikunau, Nabetari washed up near Manus, Papua New Guinea, weak and exhausted. He was looked after by local people and made a complete recovery. Nabetari was flown back to Tarawa after the war.

a good flush-through of ocean water into the lagoon at these points. It's *really* inappropriate to wear Western swimming gear anywhere in Kiribati. Women should swim in a T-shirt and baggy shorts or sarong; men in baggy shorts.

Diving

There were no dive operators in Tarawa in 2005. Several locals and expats dive, and if you ask around you may get lucky and be asked informally to join them. You'll need to know how to look after yourself underwater, and how to check the gear that's offered you; bring your own regulator if you can. Bear in mind that your travel insurance almost certainly won't cover any mishap.

Other Activities

The tiny **National Library** (Map p249; ☎ 21 254; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm, closed Thu & Sun) is in Bairiki. There's a small Pacific book collection, and it's a good place to cool off in air-con and dip into Arthur Grimble's *A Pattern of Islands*, his memoir of 1920s life in the Gilberts. If you've run out of reading matter, A\$4 buys you membership of the eclectic lending library section.

The Otintaai Hotel (opposite) runs a **Biketawa Picnic** boat on pay-week Saturdays if enough people (around 15) book; the cost is A\$10 which includes lunch. Biketawa is a small islet a third of the way along North Tarawa, where there are shady, rustic picnic tables and good swimming. The boat leaves and returns on the high tide.

A local **track group** meets on Tuesday and Thursday at 5pm at the national sports

ground in Bairiki (Map p249); everyone, including kids, is welcome to join in the informal training. If you like to **walk**, take a picnic and catch the canoe ferry from Buota and explore the islets of southern North Tarawa until you're tired; return the same way. If the tide's right, you can charter a boat to drop you further up North Tarawa, and walk your way back down to Buota.

A few people **surf** one or two decent breaks in South Tarawa; ask around locally.

SLEEPING & EATING

South Tarawa

Sweet Coconut Motel (Map p248; ☎ 21 487; Taborio; r A\$25-45; ☎) The only accommodation on Tarawa that's set directly on the ocean beach has very small rooms that could do with a lick of paint, but they're all clean, as is the well-equipped shared kitchen and bathroom. More expensive rooms have air-con and private bath. It's good value for the price and the view from the back veranda is gorgeous. There's no sign, but it's the two-storey building off the road a few hundred metres east of the petrol station at Taborio; ask there if you get lost.

Mary's Motel (Map p249; ☎ 21 164; Bairiki; s/d A\$80/85, old wing A\$55/70; ☎) At the start of the causeway to Betio, this is a good location if you've got business in Bairiki or Betio. There are several simple new rooms with refrigerator, shower and clean bathrooms; skip the run-down older rooms. The attached Mary's Restaurant and bar remain popular, with a long menu and a daily specials board (often offering local fish) from which you can eat well for A\$10. Another restaurant was due to open next door in late

2005, and planned to serve European and traditional Kiribati food; see if it's up and running when you arrive.

Otintaai Hotel (Map p248; ☎ 28 084; otintaai2@tskl.net.ki; Bikenibeu; s A\$70-80; ☎) Business travellers tend to stay at this hotel, but it's fairly charmless: the carpeted rooms smell musty, the water supply can be dodgy and you'll need earplugs to survive the Friday- and Saturday-night disco. However the lagoon-side bar and dining room has a happy hour from 6pm, and the food is decent; go for the always-reliable fish and chips (A\$8), the Tuesday- and/or Thursday-night BBQ or Friday's 'cheap cheap' food night (A\$5.50), when local dancers often perform. If you don't have transport, you may feel a bit marooned here.

Buota Lodge (Map p248; ☎ 28 906; Buota; r A\$50) Stay a night here and you'll feel you've had a week away from the bustle of the rest of South Tarawa. Three self-contained cottages with private but detached bathrooms sit on the edge of one of the channels between the lagoon and the ocean; it's nice to swim at high tide then loll on your cottage's cool veranda. There are picnic tables and BBQs on the edge of the water, and everything is set in a shady garden.

Chinese restaurants abound on Tarawa, serving pretty much identical and very ordinary food. The best of the bunch are Red Houses, near the hospital; its partner Ocean (Map p250), in Betio; and Aboy's Kitchen (Map p250), also in Betio, which serves decent noodles. All are accompanied by loud TV or videos. On the corner of the main road, just before the airport turn, is

the whitewashed Saipan restaurant – there's no sign – which serves a good lunch of tuna, rice and veggies for about A\$3.

For self-caterers, the best grocery selections are at One Stop (Map p250) and Moel's Trading Co (Map p250) in Betio; there's a smaller One Stop (Map p249) in Bairiki. The bakery (Map p250) by the Betio Theater bakes the usual slightly sweet bread, as well as regular bread. Fruit and veggies come from Australia by ship at roughly monthly intervals and often look a bit tired by the time they hit the shops. You can always find fresh greens for sale from the vegetable garden of the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP) in Abarao; drop by during office hours.

North Tarawa

Tabon Te Keekee Homestay (Map p248; ☎ 90 369; karea@tobaraol.com; s/d A\$45/55) These three charming cottages on the southern end of North Tarawa, a three-minute canoe-ride from Buota, are built in local style: open-sided with palm-frond screens and pandanus thatch. There's a clean, roofless bathroom and woven-walled loo. All cottages face the lagoon, and are on the edge of a cheerfully chaotic family compound whose various members look after you well. Rates include dinner, bed and breakfast.

Buariki Hideaway (Map p248; ☎ 26 250; buariki@kiritours.com; s/d A\$60/80) At the far end of North Tarawa, about an hour by boat from South Tarawa, this group of small local-style cottages is tucked into a private stretch of lagoon beach, with two more breezy structures extending over the water at high

DAY TOURING TARAWA

The order in which you do this day tour will depend on where you're staying. You can do it by public minibus, but a hire car is much, much easier!

Start the day at Betio with a **WWII tour** (p250), then head to Bairiki to drink refreshing coconut water (50c) at the tiny **market** and have fish and chips for lunch at **Mary's Restaurant** (opposite). In the afternoon take the main road to Bikenibeu and check out the **Umwaniobong Cultural Centre** (p250). Loop around Temaiku and drop in to the Taiwan Technical Mission's **agricultural centre** (Map p248); the mission is training local people in gardening, and producing fabulous fruit and vegetables to supply the hospital. Retrace your steps and go on to **Buota** for a taste of life outside the urban strip. If you time it right it'll be high tide, so **take a dip** in the channel by the bridge then head up to the canoe crossing.

If you don't have to be in town the next day, take the canoe ferry and stay overnight at **Tabon Te Keekee Homestay** (above) or **Buota Lodge** (above). Otherwise, turn around and stop off at the **Otintaai Hotel** (above) for sunset drinks on your way home.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lagoon Breeze Lodge (Map p248; ☎ 28 942; lagoonbreeze@lycos.com; r A\$55-70 🍷) In Abarao, this is a good choice for self-caterers, with fresh veggies always available from the garden in front. The main building has tatty but clean rooms, there's a spacious shared kitchen and veranda, and all rooms have fridges. Two stand-alone cottages, with a total of three rooms, face the water and are completely self-contained. The fixtures and fittings can be a bit Fawltly Towers, so be prepared.

Set on the lagoon, with good-sized grounds, the lodge is small and local enough to feel you're in Kiribati (you're likely to see the neighbours shimmying up a coconut tree to collect toddy when you pull the curtain in the morning) but cool, quiet and comfortable enough for overnight recovery from tropical enervation.

Ambo Lagoon Club (Map p248; Tarawa) An expat favourite with a pool table and plenty of cold beer, the Ambo is a popular venue for a Sunday afternoon drinking session. Visitors must purchase a temporary membership (A\$10).

Any number of dark and steamy seaman's bars cluster around the port area; best go with a local or not at all. Clean toilets aren't the strong point of any of these places, and remember that minibuses stop running around 9pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Hash House Harriers (☎ 26 409) The social running/drinking club beloved of many expats in many places meets at 6pm every Wednesday. The location changes every week; call John Brown for details.

Betio Theater (Map p250; A\$3) The rather grandly named Betio Theater shows five DVD movies a day (admission price will get you in for one only) on a big screen in an air-conditioned hall. If the projector's out of order, it shuts up shop until the spare parts arrive.

SHOPPING

If you're in search of I-Kiribati crafts, be sure to check out the Catholic Women's Training Centre (Map p248) between Bairiki and Bikenibeu; if you're lucky, you may find women from the outer islands making craft on-site when you visit. The quantity and quality of the work can be a bit hit and miss, but it's as authentic as you'll get.

The centre also sells *tibuta*, the hand-smocked tops worn by local women that are only found in Kiribati. You'll see them for sale all over the place, but look for hand-smocked and embroidered ones (about A\$15 to A\$18) rather than the machine-made imports from, oddly, Indonesia. *Lavalava* (Kiribati sarongs) are also widely sold on Tarawa.

Pacific World Travel in Bikenibeu features an excellent selection of quality handicrafts, and – along with To-baraoi Travel in Betio – is the only place that stocks two beautiful coffee-table books of photographs by Tony and Joan Whincup. *Kiribati* (A\$30) contains photographs only, and *Akekeia! Traditional Dance in Kiribati* (A\$85) has detailed text

and photographs. The shop also has a small selection of posters (A\$20) for you to choose from.

Stamp collectors will find everything from Kiribati lobsters to Japanese seaplanes on stamps at Kiribati's **Philatelic Bureau** (Map p250; ☎ 26 515) beside the post office in Betio.

English-language or English-subtitled DVDs on Kiribati culture and history (A\$20 to A\$30) are available at A Nei Tabera Ni Kai in Bairiki (p248); it'll be much easier to show than to explain your Kiribati experience to family and friends when you get home!

OUTER ISLANDS

Beyond Tarawa, packaged Western products are a rarity and life is more relaxed. People live off fish and coconuts, and occasionally earn revenue by selling copra abroad. Women sit by thatched huts weaving pandanus or salting clams to send to Tarawa. People don't have much, and they share what they do have; if you're staying with locals, take contributions of food for your hosts and small gifts for their children.

Rarely are there more than a few trucks on these islands, and communications are limited to contact with the outside world by radio-phone. Be prepared to hang around for days, sometimes weeks, if planes or ships are delayed. Health care is minimal at best.

The outer Gilberts are inhabited, and some of the better-known or more easily accessible islands are described below. Except for Kanton's 30 people the Phoenix Islands are uninhabited. Among the Line Islands to the east, only Fanning, Washington and Christmas Island are settled.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Kiribati (Map p249; ☎ 21 550, 21 227; www.kiri-tours.com; Tarawa) flies to most outer Gilberts at least weekly. There is no air service to the Phoenix or Line Islands except Christmas Island (see p261). The following one-way fares are for flights originating from Tarawa.

Destination	No of flights weekly	Fare
Abaiang	3	A\$30
Abemama	4	A\$45
Aranuka	3	A\$50
Arorae	1	A\$155
Beru	1	A\$120
Butaritari	3	A\$65
Kuria	3	A\$50
Maiana	2	A\$30
Makin	2	A\$70
Marakei	2	A\$35
Nonouti	2	A\$80
Onotoa	1	A\$120
Tabiteuea North	5	A\$95
Tabiteuea South	1	A\$105

Boat

The Betio-based **Supercat** (☎ 22 538) started operation in the Gilbert Islands in 2005, travelling on a somewhat loose schedule south to Maiana, Kuria and Abemama (A\$40), and north to Abaiang, Marakei, Butaritari (A\$55) and Makin. It's best not to rely on the Supercat if you're travelling on a tight schedule.

Kiribati Shipping Services Ltd (KSSL; Map p250; ☎ 26 195; kssl@tskl.net.ki; Betio) sends supply-cum-passenger ships to most of the outer islands at roughly monthly intervals. The visitor information centre in Betio (p248) has a list of other private shipping companies that serve the islands. Of the outer Gilbert Islands, only Abaiang, Maiana, Tabiteuea South, Onotoa and Abemama have lagoons that can handle large boats – at other islands small dinghies or canoes transfer people and goods from ships at anchor outside the lagoon.

Yachtsies may be required to pay a fee to island councils.

OUTER GILBERT ISLANDS

Abaiang Atoll

pop 5794 / area 17.5 sq km

Four hours by boat or 15 minutes by plane from Tarawa, Abaiang is the most accessible of Kiribati's outer islands but offers a typically remote experience. A pretty sand road runs the 25km length of the atoll, alongside which you'll see bundles of palm-frond thatch being woven and stacked to go by truck to Tarawa; women drying fish and salting clams; and cut coconut drying into copra in family compounds. Also check out what's happening in the lagoon-side boat-building

shed, south of the airport. Ask around to hire either a bicycle (about A\$5 a day and lots of stamina) or a motorbike (A\$20).

The boat usually docks just north of Taburao, a few kilometres from the airstrip. Hitch a ride with one of the church, council or school trucks that come to collect passengers, mail and supplies from the boats and planes. There was no island resthouse in 2005, although privately run accommodation was under construction in the island's north and the two island schools (attached to the Catholic and Protestant churches) have guesthouses where you might be able to stay. Ask at Betio's visitor information centre (p248) about the current situation. Boats head to Abaiang every

Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 10am (A\$7) from Betio on Tarawa.

Abemama

pop 3142 / area 27 sq km

Robert Louis Stevenson spent time here during his voyage aboard the *Equator* in 1889, and wrote of his encounter with the king of Abemama. Alone among the outer islands, there is still a royal family on Abemama that retains the title, if not the power, of king. The island was considered as a possible capital for the Gilberts, along with Butaritari and Tarawa, but the British colonial government deemed its lagoon passage too dangerous.

In addition to the Island Council **rest-house** (☎ 41 014), the privately run **Central**

Oneness Rest House (s/d incl meals A\$40/50) was due to open in late 2005 on the lagoon at Kauma. Check with Linda Uaan at **A Nei Tab-
era Ni Kai** (Map p249; ☎ 21 747; kirivid@hotmail.com) in Bairiki to see if it's up and running.

Butaritari Atoll

pop 3464 / area 13.5 sq km

Butaritari is Kiribati's greenest and most fertile island, thanks to its abundant rainfall. Robert Louis Stevenson arrived in Butaritari in July 1889 to find the entire island drunk in the wake of the 4 July celebrations hosted by the resident American traders. The experience of seeing a man lose his earlobe in a barroom brawl encouraged him to lobby for temperance – at least from hard liquor – in the islands.

Butaritari was the first of the Gilberts to be occupied by the Japanese during WWII, when 300 troops landed in Ukiangang in the south of the island in December 1941. A temporary victory by the Americans in 1942 angered the Japanese, and their retaliatory air raid killed 41 villagers at Keuea. It's likely that more Gilbertese men would have been killed but for the intervention of Kansake, a Japanese trader long resident in Butaritari who pleaded for their lives. In a second counter-invasion on 20 November 1943, the US won back the island from the Japanese. An annual celebration on 20 November called the Remembrance of Underground Cave Openings commemorates the day when the village elders were able to emerge from their cave hideouts.

In addition to the island resthouse, there's the family-owned **Pearl Shell Resthouse** (per person A\$30), fronting a good swimming and snorkelling area in Onomaru village. The owners, Ioanna and Bakaati, speak good English, and can arrange local tours. Call **Tematoro** (☎ work 21 185, home 21 597) in Tarawa to book.

Banaba (Ocean Island)

pop 276 / area 6.3 sq km

Banaba, Kiribati's only uplifted limestone island, rises to 78m above sea level, so it's quite different in feel and appearance from the rest of the country. The island's former English name comes from the ship *Ocean* which visited in 1804.

Like its neighbour Nauru (and also Australia's far-distant Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean), Banaba's fate was sealed

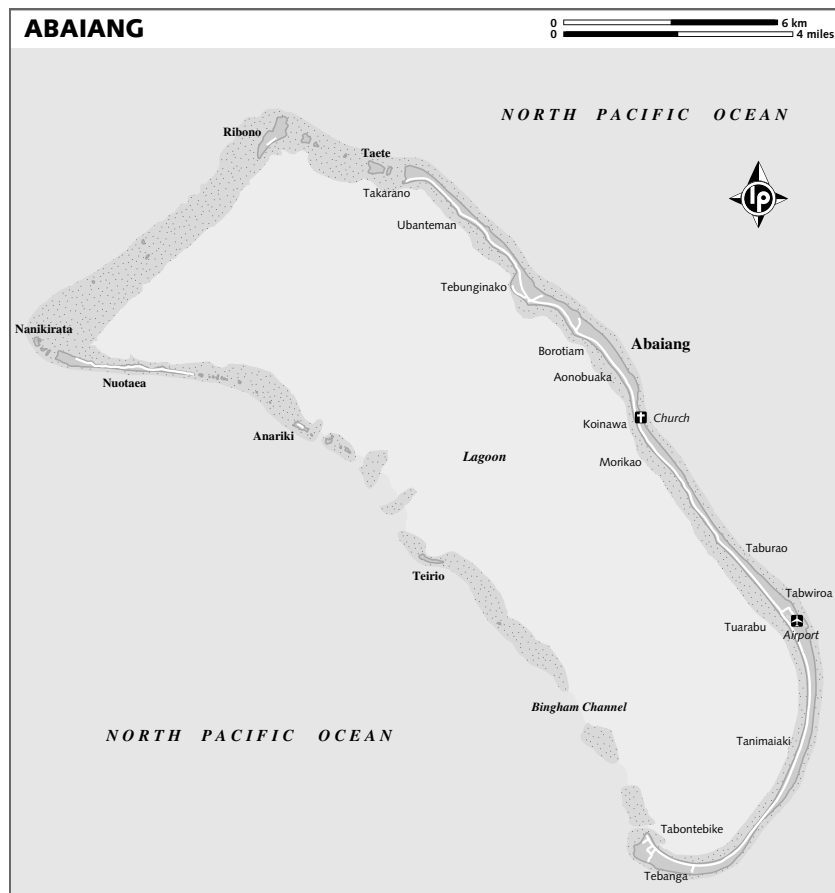
in 1900 by the discovery and extraction of high-grade phosphate (see p243) by geologist Albert Ellis of the Pacific Islands Company, later renamed the British Phosphate Commission (BPC). Banaba's story forms the centrepiece of Daryl Tarte's novel *Islands of the Frigate Bird* (see p246).

The Japanese arrived in 1942 to find that the phosphate works had been sabotaged in expectation of their arrival, and most Banabans and Gilbertese had been relocated. In August 1945 an order to kill the 160 Banabans remaining on the island was issued; they were forced to kneel blindfolded at the top of a cliff before being shot and toppling over the precipice. A survivor, Kabunare, crawled from his cave hideout months later to recount the horror.

The postwar years saw a boom in phosphate which wasn't reflected in the islanders' income. Becoming politicised, Banabans fought for a higher percentage of mining royalties, which were a shameful 15% in the 1960s but which rose to 50% by the 1970s. Banabans also, reasonably enough, wanted money to rehabilitate the now barren minefields. After a lengthy legal battle that saw islanders appear in the High Court in London, A\$500,000 was awarded. Another A\$10 million was on the table, but Banabans would not accept it without an agreement on self-government, separation from the Gilberts and free association with Fiji. The British delayed making a decision and in 1979, just as Kiribati received independence, Banaba's phosphate ran out. The resultant lack of resources made Banaban independence – always strongly opposed by central government in Tarawa – impossible; see www.banaban.com for information on Banaba's independence movement.

Banaba today is a graveyard of rusting equipment and industrial infrastructure, and the ghost settlements and houses of the former BPC managers. Set in a sort of time warp, it's as if the BPC staff simply upped and left, leaving invoices in offices and walking away from machinery where it stood. There's talk of bringing in a drilling rig to explore the possibility of mining second-grade phosphate from the stockpiles, but even simply landing on the island is a major challenge.

Despite this, a small settlement of islanders remains, living off the ocean and the



RABI ISLAND RESETTLEMENT

After WWII ended, the widespread destruction of Banaba made it impossible for the hundreds of deported Banabans to return, so they agreed to resettle for two years on the island of Rabi (pronounced 'ram-bi'), off the coast of Fiji's second-largest island, Vanua Levu. Rabi had been bought for £25,000 in 1942 by the British Phosphate Commission with Banaban phosphate trust money. The first Banabans arrived on 15 December 1945 and within two years they voted to remain on Rabi. Now citizens of Fiji, the Banabans on Rabi have become a separate community, closed to tourists and accessible only by sporadic ship. They have one representative in the Kiribati parliament. To visit Rabi you must obtain permission from the Banaba Island Council on Suva.

land; mango trees imported by BPC staff thrive, and the island is generally greener than the low-lying atolls. Drinking water can be a problem – limestone is porous and doesn't support a water lens – so rainwater is collected. The island resthouse is near the harbour and access is by government supply ship only; Banaba is not a port of entry for yachts.

Other Gilbert Islands

Makin is the northernmost of the Gilbert Islands. At its northern tip is **Nakaa's Beach**, the traditional point of departure for I-Kiribati spirits heading to the underworld. Arthur Grimble's *A Pattern of Islands* has a spooky account of his visit there in the 1920s, a story reworked in Daryl Tarte's novel *Islands of the Frigate Bird*.

Tabiteuea is known for its bloody battle of 1881, when fierce fighters from the pagan north of the atoll fought with – and nearly annihilated – the Christian southerners; people from Tab North are still regarded with a degree of trepidation by many other I-Kiribati. The atoll has never had a chiefly system in place; 'Tabiteuea' literally means 'forbidden to kings'.

To the south, **Onotoa** is known for its handicrafts, particularly *te wii ni bakua* – the shark-tooth *tibuta* (hand-smocked tops) – and *te koroti n Onotoa*, a crocheted pattern based on the Onotoa rose. Its neighbouring

island to the south, **Tamana**, is a Protestant island whose church was visited by Robert Louis Stevenson during his Pacific voyages.

LINE ISLANDS

Washington Island (Teraina)

pop 630 / 7.8 sq km

Washington is unique in that it encloses a large and completely landlocked freshwater lagoon surrounded by peat bogs and reeds; it looks a bit like the Florida Everglades with coconut palms. The lagoon is fed by an almost daily dump of rain, a huge 750cm a year. The northernmost of the Line Islands group, it was named in 1798 by Captain Fanning (see below) in honour of the first US president.

There's a small island guesthouse, but there are no channels into the lagoon; supply ships and yachts moor in often rough and unpredictable weather off-shore. Email chuck@fanning-island.com for more information.

Fanning Island (Tabuaeran)

pop 2000 / area 34 sq km

One of the northern Line Islands, ring-shaped Fanning hasn't always been settled; when the whaler *Betsy* came through in 1798, captained by Edmund Fanning, there were no inhabitants. Traces of Polynesian *marae* have been dated to between 600 and 1200 years ago and suggest earlier temporary settlements; they can still be seen.

Some kilometres north of the harbour is an overgrown runway, site of the 1902 cable station that was part of the remarkable first trans-Pacific cable that ran from Australia to Fiji and Fanning, through to Vancouver. In 1914, the German cruiser *Nuremberg* cut the cable but it was later restored and in use until the 1960s.

Fanning has enjoyed something of a surge in its economy of late, with port calls three times a month by **Norwegian Cruise Line** (www.ncl.com). In 2003 the US\$6 per person visitor fee brought just over A\$1 million into the Kiribati economy, not to mention the boom in sales of handicrafts by the islanders and job opportunities for the locals.

The few other visitors to Fanning include surfers, divers (there's a long and spectacular narrow-pass drift dive through the channel and into the lagoon), scientists and radio hams (amateur radio operators) who mostly fly to Christmas Island and

then charter the boat owned by **Chuck Corbett** (chuck@fanning-island.com; two weeks' live aboard US\$7000, not incl bottled water and beer). Chuck is a mellow surfer (American by birth and now a citizen of Kiribati) who has lived on the islands for years. He is *the* person to contact for information about Fanning and Washington, either via his website (www.fanning-island.com) or by email.

Fanning is a port of entry, and yachties pay a one-off anchorage fee of A\$10. Don't expect to replenish goods here; the government supply and passenger ship comes roughly every three months and food supplies are often scarce.

Christmas Island (Kiritimati)

pop 3431 / area 388 sq km

Pincer-shaped Christmas Island contains 48% of Kiribati's land area and is the world's largest coral atoll. Flying in over its multiple shimmering salt flats and lagoon shallows is a wonderful experience: the dry, windswept landscape of salt bush and coconut palms is glacially bright and dusty, and impressively desolate. The island is one of the world's great seabird sanctuaries, home to millions of birds of 18 species, and the lagoon hosts a dazzling array of marine life.

Christmas Island has a colourful history. Captain Cook arrived for a brief visit on 24 December 1777, hence the island's name. Cook found remnants of early Polynesian visitors but no sign of permanent settlement. Largely unvisited until the 1850s, the island was then variously worked (unsuccessfully) by American phosphate interests and a New Zealand (NZ) copra and pearl-shell company. In the 1880s it came under the umbrella of British interests in the Pacific, and officially became part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony in 1919.

French former priest Emmanuel Rougier was granted a coconut-plantation licence in 1914. He named his now-deserted settlement Paris, and ruled the island and his Pacific workers with an iron hand until the 1930s. (Poland was named after his Polish mechanic and the township of London came later, across the channel of course!) In 1941 the British authorised the employment of a manager and Gilbertese workers to take over the plantations, initiating the island's permanent settlement.

Between 1957 and 1962 Christmas Island was the site for high-altitude hydrogen bomb tests, first by the British and then by the Americans. Millions of birds were instantly blinded and later died in the immediate aftermath; both civilians and military workers have since experienced ongoing health problems. The tests had no obvious long-term environmental effects on the island and background radiation is now lower than normal levels. A massive cleanup campaign funded by the British between 2005 and 2006 has removed almost all visible traces of this part of the Cold War.

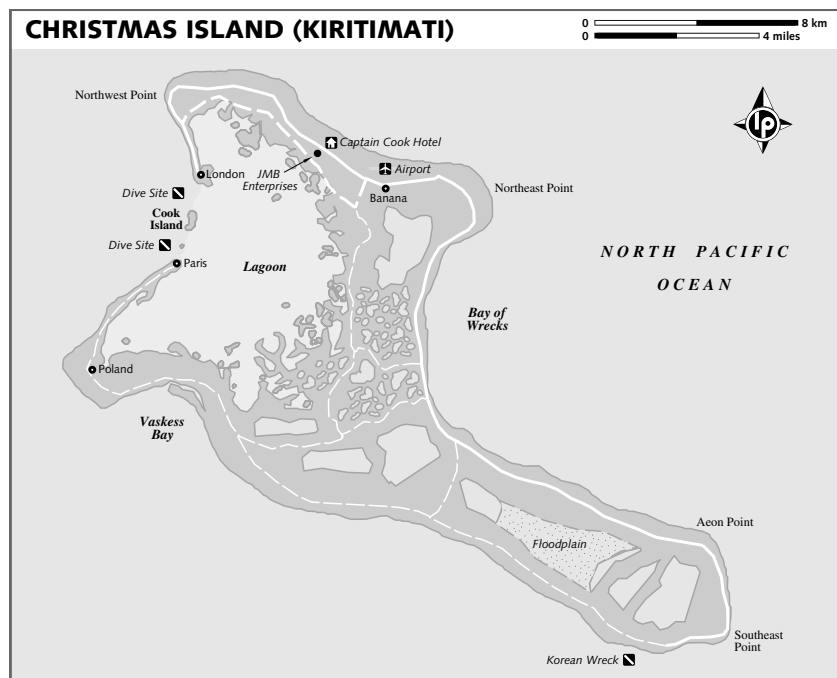
More recently, Christmas Island has become the focus of a government initiative to resettle several thousand I-Kiribati from the crowded atoll of Tarawa, which is having a marked impact on the island's wildlife. Less permanent visitors include sport fishers, mesmerised by the large bonefish that lurk on the sand flats. When air services are running regularly, Christmas Island's tally of around 1500 annual visitors far exceeds Tarawa's slender tourist numbers.

CUTTING TODDY

Kiribati's local brew is *kaokioki*, or sour toddy; it fills the niche of the kava drunk on other Pacific islands. Essentially, it's fermented sap tapped from the coconut palm; if you glance up at the palms when you're walking along the road you'll see the innocuous glass bottles hanging from the trees. The syrupy 'sweet toddy' skips the fermentation stage.

'Cutting toddy', as the extraction procedure is called, is done by I-Kiribati men and requires technique and skill. The men shimmy up the coconut palms, collect the full bottle from the previous shift, make a new nick in the stem of the coconut frond, and bend a leaf to form a spout from which the sap will continue to drip into a new bottle. Most men cut their toddy twice a day, in the early morning and again at dusk.

Sour toddy is ubiquitous but you won't find it in restaurants or bars. Instead, just ask a local to point you to the nearest toddy purveyor. A word of caution: toddy is often diluted with tap water, which is not likely to be boiled; ask for 'boiled toddy' for a refreshing nonalcoholic drink.



INFORMATION

Most government services are in tiny London, at the tip of the island's northernmost pincer.

The post office, ANZ/Bank of Kiribati, and TSKL telecommunications centre (with Internet access) are next door to each other. **Tobaraoi Travel** (info@kiribatiholidays.com) has a small travel agency in the TSKL building. The bank will change US, UK and Fiji currency and travellers cheques – and some others – but at dreadful rates and for a hefty fee; you're far better to change cash at JMB Enterprises, opposite the Captain Cook Hotel.

The Wildlife Conservation Information and Marketing Office, close to the bank, issues permits to visit the four restricted wildlife areas.

The island is a prized destination for radio hams (radio call sign T32).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Birdwatchers come to Christmas Island to see the endemic Line Islands warbler, as well as 18 species of nesting seabirds in

huge numbers. **Cook Island**, in the channel between Paris and London, is a Mecca for nesting sooty terns. Along with the islets of **Motu Tabu**, **Motu Upua** and **Ngaon te Taake**, it's a protected closed area and you need a wildlife guide to land. Even if you decide not to land, you can swing by and marvel at the noisy thicket of birds. You'll need to hire a boat from Dive Kiribati (see opposite) to see these, plus a guide and permit (A\$10 per person per island) if you decide to land. Try to locate a copy of the hard-to-find *The Birdlife of Christmas Island* by H Lee Jones (2000).

At the end of the sealed road beyond Southeast Point is a **Korean wreck**, about a two-hour drive from London. The coast road goes through gorgeously wild and desolate country alongside the (not diveable) **Bay of Wrecks** and, further south, through bird-nesting colonies. The interior consists largely of desolate salt flats where the legendary bonefish abound. It is extremely easy to get lost in the flats, so be sure you don't venture in without a guide.

Diving & Sport Fishing

The abundance of bonefish makes Christmas Island a highly desirable fishing destination; one fisherman was making his 15th trip when we were visiting! Divers and snorkellers will see a variety of marine life, and may get the chance to swim with manta rays and dolphins.

Most visitors come to Christmas Island on sport fishing and/or diving packages. Flights originate in Fiji, although Christmas Island is more accessible from Australia and NZ. A few tour operators have shown increasing interest in Christmas; search the Internet for options. There's a permit fee of A\$35 for diving and for fishing; this will be included in the package price.

Christmas Island Outfitters (www.prfflyfishing.com) Offers guided scuba-diving and fishing tours with accommodation at the Mini Hotel Kiritimati from US\$1695 per person.

Dive Kiribati (☎ 81 139, sat phone 881631442811; divekiribati@juno.com) The only international-standard dive operation on the island, run by long-term Californian transplant Kim Andersen (a goldmine of information). Offers package deals, one-/two-/three-tank dives for US\$80/100/125, the only offshore fishing opportunity and boat rental for around US\$100 per half-day for snorkelling and birding trips.

Frontiers Travel (www.frontierstravel.com) Based in the US, and the largest inbound tour operator. Sport fishing and/or diving trips with accommodation at the Captain Cook Hotel start around US\$3000.

SLEEPING & EATING

Christmas Island has three accommodation places, but none of them are luxurious; add 10% tax to the rates below.

Captain Cook Hotel (chxmas@tskl.net.ki; r A\$80; ☎) Close to the airport and a 30-minute ride from London, the Captain Cook is fabulously located on the ocean, with a long sweep of beach in front. Service is friendly but consistently average, rooms are cleanish and adequate, and the food is filling. Check the locks and windows, as attempted break-ins are increasingly common. Buffet meals are served, with breakfast/lunch/dinner costing A\$10/8/20. The Saturday-night luau with spit-roast pig and local dance performance costs A\$40.

Mini Hotel Kiritimati (☎ 81 371; minihotel@tskl.net.ki; s without/with air-con A\$35/70, d A\$35/95; ☎) Eri and Agnes' friendly place, close to the boat

ramp in London but away from the water, has a few basic, clean rooms with shared bathrooms. If you're not on a package Agnes will cook on request (breakfast A\$7, lunch A\$7, dinner A\$10 to A\$15).

Dive & Sport Resort (☎ 81 364; r A\$60) This place in London has four clean and simple rooms with private bathroom, set in a small compound around a courtyard and dining area. A filling dinner is served for A\$8.50.

Kristena's Restaurant Also in London, Kristena's serves decent lunches of meat, chicken or fish with rice for A\$3.

Food on the island is simple, and the supply of fresh fruit and veggies is limited. Very basic supplies are available; you might want to bring some rations with you, though no fresh food can be brought in. Snack items (and, usually, cold beer) are available at a couple of small stores in London and Banana, and at JMB Enterprises near the Captain Cook Hotel.

DRINKING

Friday and Saturday nights see some wild drinking and dancing sessions at the local bars, particularly Big Eddie's near the Captain Cook Hotel. Things kick off around midnight and continue all night; women on their own should steer well clear.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Transport to Christmas Island can be erratic at best, and months can go by with no regular air service. The airport is a 15-minute drive from the Captain Cook Hotel and a 45-minute drive from London.

In 2005 **Air Pacific** (www.airpacific.com) began a much-needed weekly flight from Nadi, Fiji, to Christmas Island and on to Honolulu. The return fare from Nadi to Christmas Island is around A\$1500, and from Honolulu to Christmas Island around US\$1100.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING TO?

Several unfortunate visitors have confused this Christmas Island with the other Christmas Island in Australia's Indian Ocean Territories, famous for its annual red-crab migration. It's a time-consuming and costly mistake to make!

Kiribati Shipping Services Ltd (KSSL; Map p250; ☎ 26 195; kssl@tskl.net.ki; Betio) sends a supply and passenger ship from Tarawa to Christmas Island at roughly monthly intervals.

Yachties pay a A\$10 customs fee, but there are no other official fees if moored off the jetty; email chuck@fanning-island.com for current information.

GETTING AROUND

Hotels arrange transfers to and from the airport. Several minibuses run between Banana and London (A\$1.20) from about 7am to 9pm; just flag them down.

You can hire vehicles informally for around A\$65 per day; ask at JMB Enterprises near the Captain Cook Hotel, the Dojin store in London, or at your hotel. Watch out for the near-invisible speed bumps. You might be able to find a bicycle for hire.

PHOENIX ISLANDS

The eight atolls of the Phoenix Islands, lying south of the equator, are remote and – with the exception of tiny Kanton – uninhabited. Occasional supply ships visit on the way to the Line Islands.

KIRIBATI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Tarawa has a handful of hotels and Christmas Island has three, but don't expect luxury. There are homestays on some outer Gilbert Islands, and most islands have a council resthouse. A government tax of 10% is payable on all room rates; check whether or not it's included in the price.

PRACTICALITIES

- A weekly news leaflet, *Uekera*, is printed in Tarawa in English and (mostly) Kiribati.
- Kiribati received its first TV broadcasts in 2005. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC Asia-Pacific) and CNN are available in Tarawa, as are local-language programmes. Radio Kiribati airs brief English-language news broadcasts, and the BBC World Service is on 100 FM in Tarawa.
- DVDs have superseded videos in Kiribati and are widely available for hire.
- Electricity is supplied at 240V, 50Hz AC, and an Australian-type three-slot plug is used. On Christmas Island some plugs are US two-prong style and the voltage may also differ.
- Kiribati uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

ACTIVITIES

Diving is only available on Christmas Island (see p261). There's no organised diving anywhere else in Kiribati, though if you bring your own gear to Tarawa you'll probably find someone to take you shallow-diving in the lagoon. World-class bonefishing and bird-watching are available on Christmas Island.

BOOKS

Tarawa – the Aftermath by Donald K Allen is a recent account of WWII in the Gilbert Islands which puts the war and its effects into a contemporary context. The book's associated website (www.tarawatheaftermath.com) allows readers to add their own stories.

Kiribati – Aspects of History is recounted and written by I-Kiribati; it's a good read, if a bit dated (published 1979).

For a history of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands' failed marriage, read *Cinderellas of the Empire – Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu* by Barrie Macdonald.

The Christmas Island Story by Eric Bailey gives a good overview of the island's history, including the nuclear testing of the 1950s and '60s. For other recommended reading, see p245.

BUSINESS HOURS

Typical office hours are Monday to Friday from 8am to 4.30pm, while banks and post offices are open from 9.30am to 3pm; it's prudent to anticipate some flexibility around the scheduled 12.30pm to 1.30pm lunch break. Most shops and kiosks are open early and keep long hours; 8am to 8pm is common.

CHILDREN

If your children are hardy and healthy, can cope with being a constant focus of attention and are good at keeping themselves entertained, they'll be just fine in Kiribati. They should never drink tap water anywhere in Kiribati, and rainwater must always be boiled before drinking. Also bear in mind that fresh food is minimal and health care is very limited.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Kiribati Embassies & Consulates

Australia (☎ 02-9371 7808; fax 9371 0248)

Fiji (☎ 679-330 2512; kiribatihighcom@connect.com.fj;

Kiribati High Commission)

Germany (☎ 40-3614 6112; fax 3614 6123)

Japan (☎ 03-3201 3487; fax 3214 1884)

New Zealand (☎ 09-419 0404; fax 419 1414)

UK (☎ /fax 1873 840375)

USA (☎ 808 834 6775; fax 253 0824; Hawai'i)

Embassies & Consulates in Kiribati

Australia (Map p249; ☎ 21 184) High Commission.

New Zealand (Map p249; ☎ 21 400) High Commission.

Taiwan (Map p249; ☎ 22 557) Embassy.

INTERNET ACCESS

There's one Internet café in Bairiki (p248) on Tarawa and one on Christmas Island (p260). The Internet can go out for weeks at a time.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Fanning Islands (www.fanning-island.com) A great resource for travellers to the Line Islands.

Jane's Oceania (www.janeresture.com/kirihome) A fantastic site for Kiribati tourism, history, culture and many other recent and archival resources.

Kiribati Tourism (www.visit-kiribati.com) The official website of the Kiribati National Tourism Office.

Stephen Trussel (www.trussel.com) The website of a Micronesian linguist, with an eclectic bibliography and a good selection of Kiribati articles and photos.

Tobaraoi Travel (www.kiribatiholidays.com) The travel agency's website is still under development as we write, but the email link is active and the company will respond with accurate in-country travel information.

MAPS

Decent topographic maps of single atolls are available – if they're in stock – from the **Land Management Division** (Map p249; ☎ 21 283; Bairiki) of the Department of Environment, Lands & Agriculture Development; it's upstairs in the

unsigned grey building beside the library in Bairiki. Each map costs around A\$8.

MONEY

Kiribati's currency is the Australian dollar (for an exchange rates table, see the Quick Reference page), although some transactions on Christmas Island are in US dollars. Credit cards are accepted only by the Otintaa Hotel, Toyota rental cars and Tobaraoi travel agency on Tarawa; there's a fee charged. Credit cards are not accepted on Christmas Island, and prices are slightly higher there than elsewhere in Kiribati.

The ANZ/Bank of Kiribati, with three branches on Tarawa and one on Christmas Island, exchanges some foreign currencies and travellers cheques; rates are dire. There are ATMs in Bikenibeu, Bairiki and Betio on Tarawa but do not assume they will be working. Take plenty of cash with you.

Tipping is not usual.

TELEPHONE

Kiribati's international telephone code is ☎ 686; there are no area codes. Only Tarawa, Abemama, Maiana and Christmas Island have landlines. The remaining outer islands have radio-phones; you can book a call or send a message from Telecom Services Kiribati Ltd's telephone offices in Betio, Bairiki or Bikenibeu on Tarawa. International calls are very expensive; one minute to Australia costs A\$3.

HOW MUCH?

- **Insect repellent:** A\$8
- **Shampoo:** A\$4
- **Can baked beans:** A\$3
- **Overnight DVD hire:** A\$3
- **Small bag M&Ms:** A\$4

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** A\$1.03
- **1.5L bottled water:** A\$2
- **Can of XXXX beer:** A\$1.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt/tibuta:** A\$15
- **Drinking coconut:** 50c

Mobile Phones

Mobiles were introduced to Tarawa in 2005, and they can be used only in South Tarawa. SIM cards (which can be bought at TSKL in Bairiki; see p248) are available for visitors.

Phonecards

Cards are available at TSKL and at a few petrol stations and stores on Tarawa.

TIME

Tarawa is 12 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon on Tarawa it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am the same day in Sydney and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

Christmas Island is 14 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon on Christmas Island it's 10am in Tarawa and Suva, 8am the same day in Sydney and noon the previous day in Hawai'i.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information is available at the visitor information centre (see p248) at Betio on Tarawa.

VISAS

Citizens of Britain, Canada and NZ can enter visa-free for a 28-day maximum stay; check before you leave home though, as the visa situation is pretty fluid. Citizens of other countries, including the US and Australia, need prearranged visas (A\$40 single entry, A\$70 multiple entry). As of 2005, visas are no longer granted upon entry and people have been turned back on arrival.

Academic researchers and commercial photographers be warned: you are officially required to pay a hefty A\$350 fee to the Ministry of Environment, Lands & Agriculture Development. Noncommercial photographers who take serious camera gear may find themselves arguing about this at the airport.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Kiribati is not the safest place for women. Some of the most genial I-Kiribati undergo a Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation during

Friday and Saturday night binge-drinking sessions. Pay days are particularly scary, and bars and their general vicinity should be avoided by women unless in a group. Don't travel alone on minibuses at night, and make sure your accommodation is secure. Follow the dress code of local women – wear baggy clothes from shoulder to knee, and swim in shorts and a T-shirt, uncomfortable as it is. The outer islands are generally OK, but be wary on Tarawa and Christmas Island.

TRANSPORT IN KIRIBATI

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Only Tarawa and Christmas Island are serviced by international flights.

The flight to Kiribati is usually operated by **Air Nauru** (www.southpacific.org/map/airnauru.html; melb_sales@airnauru.com.au), but things are in flux since its only plane was repossessed in late 2005. At the time of writing Air Pacific was running a weekly return flight from Nadi to Tarawa (around A\$1500), but this may well change.

Air Pacific (www.airpacific.com) has a return weekly service between Nadi, Fiji, and Honolulu via Christmas Island (see p261).

Sea

Supply ships occasionally go to Fiji and Tuvalu. Contact the operations manager at **Kiribati Shipping Services Ltd** (kssl@tskl.net.ki) for prices and information about any planned departures to Tuvalu and Fiji.

Tarawa, Christmas and Fanning Islands are currently the only islands in Kiribati with formal harbour dues and all are ports of entry for yachts; island councils elsewhere may charge a fee. Tarawa, Fanning and some of the outer Gilberts have good channels and harbour facilities.

Tours

Valor Tours (☎ 415-332 7850, 800 842 4504; www.valortours.com) is a US-based company that specialises in WWII history and can help arrange a trip to Tarawa. **Pacific World Travel** (☎ 28 715; www.tobaraoi.com; karea@tobaraoi.com) in Tarawa can organise transport and accommodation throughout Kiribati, including Christmas Island.

Most tourists to Christmas Island go on package sport fishing or diving tours; see p261 for details.

GETTING AROUND

Air

AIRLINES IN KIRIBATI

Air Kiribati (Map p249; ☎ 21 550, 21 227; www.kiritours.com; Tarawa) flies to most outer Gilberts at least once a week; see p255 for destinations, fares and frequencies. Air Kiribati's planes are regularly grounded for lack of fuel or encounter some other trouble, so it's wise to allow a bit of extra time if you're planning a visit to one of the outer islands.

Boat

Most of the outer Gilberts are serviced by supply ships from Tarawa every month or

two, and ships go occasionally from Tarawa to Christmas, Fanning and Washington Islands (see p255). There is a regular boat from Tarawa to Abaang (A\$7 one way), the closest of the outer Gilbert Islands.

Bus

Tarawa and Christmas Island have efficient minibus services.

Car & Motorcycle

Formal car rentals are available on Tarawa (p250). Bring your home driving licence and ask about insurance. Informal rentals are available on Christmas Island. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road.

On the outer islands you may be able to rent a bicycle or motor scooter or get a boat ride, but there won't be too many trucks.

DEPARTURE TAX

Tarawa and Christmas Island each have an A\$20 departure tax.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Marshall Islands

The air is tangy with sea salt on the thousand or so slender, flat coral islands that make up the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Living on these narrow strips of land between ocean and lagoon, the Marshallese are expert fishers and navigators, having long been reliant on the sea.

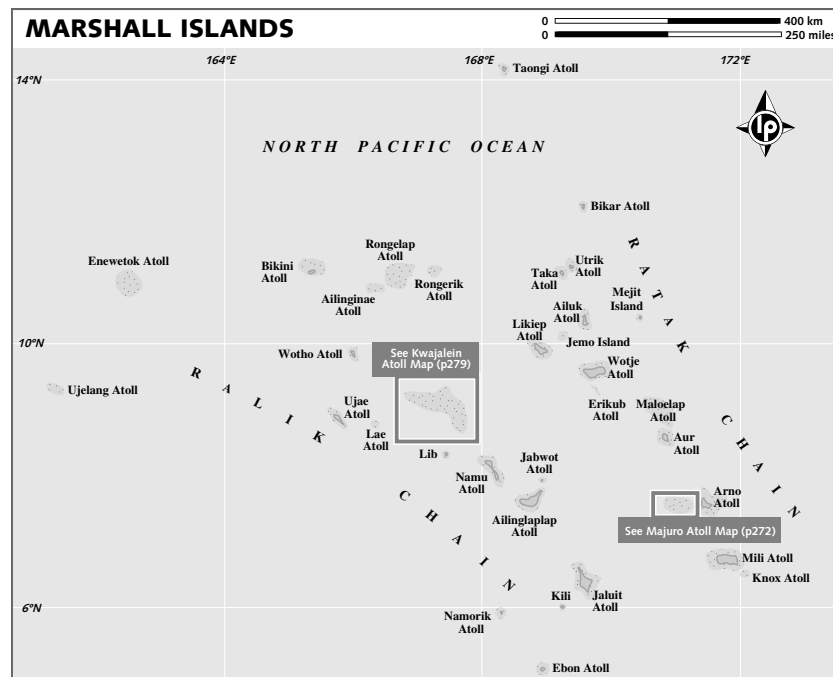
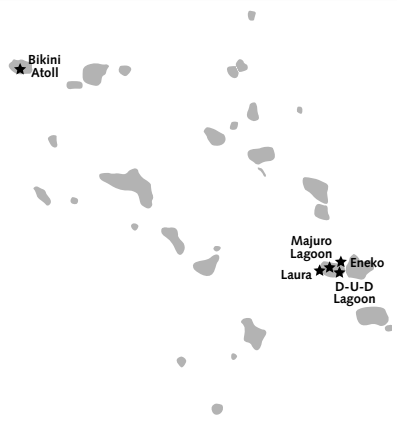
Local faces reflect the islands' history. In the late 1700s, after 2000 years of isolation, these Micronesian islands were variously visited, settled, colonised or occupied by British, Russians, Germans, Japanese and Americans (at first by missionaries, later by defence forces). Today the more developed atolls have a sense of all these influences, with well-stocked stores carrying international groceries, restaurants serving the food of several nations, and basketball courts on many street corners. On the quieter backstreets the Marshallese continue to live in family compounds, surrounded by flowers.

The two main atolls have quite different characters. While it's Westernised, the capital, Majuro, retains much of the languid feel of the tropics. In contrast, Kwajalein is leased to the US military for missile testing and is virtually closed to nonmilitary visitors, its local workers shuttled to the wall-to-wall tenements of Ebeye.

The RMI's charm lies in its outer islands which – except for the traumatic nuclear history of some – still retain the pristine feel of the tropical Pacific. If you have only a few days to spend here, don't run your schedule too tightly alongside that of Air Marshall Islands (AMI) – it generally serves outer atolls just once weekly, and delays of up to many days are common. You can still get a feel for the classic Robinson Crusoe lifestyle by visiting one of the small islands in Majuro Atoll, though divers often bypass Majuro and head straight to Bikini for WWII wreck-diving or Rongelap for nature-diving.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sail the waters of **Majuro lagoon** (p273) in a traditional outrigger canoe
- Dive WWII wrecks at **Bikini Atoll** (p282)
- Float in the **D-U-D lagoon** (p273) just before sunset and watch the early-evening action onshore
- Picnic on the pristine white-sand beach at **Laura** (p275)
- Overnight in eco-friendly beach accommodation at **Eneko** (p276)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

On Majuro the daily temperature is around 27°C, with relatively high humidity. The northern Marshalls are quite dry, but some southern islands get up to 4060mm of rain a year. Majuro's wet period is September to November. Thankfully, full-blown tropical storms and cyclones are rare – the last memorable one was in 1918.

HISTORY

The Marshallese are thought to have come from Southeast Asia more than 2000 years ago. Over time, the settlers organised themselves into lineage groups and spread through the double chain of atolls. They developed their own lifestyle and social structure, befitting the sparse and isolated environment.

Outside Influences

The islands were first sighted by Europeans in 1526, by Spanish Captain Garcia de Loyasa. There was no further contact until 1788, when Britain's Captain Marshall 'rediscovered' them and they were given his

name. Traders and whalers visited in the early 19th century, but violent attacks by the Marshallese repelled them.

It wasn't until the 1860s that German trading companies started to build links with some of the islands and create a network of island stations for trade in copra and retail goods. Germany formally annexed the

MARSHALL ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and atoll):** Delap-Uliga-Darrit, or D-U-D Municipality (Majuro)
- **Population:** 65,000
- **Land area:** 181 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Five high islands, 29 atolls
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 692
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** Marshallese and English
- **Greeting:** *Yokwe yuk* ('love to you')
- **Website:** www.visitmarshallislands.com

GOVERNING THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

The two legislative bodies are the Council of Iroij, the Upper House, and the Nitijela, the Lower House. The Council of Iroij, comprised of hereditary tribal chiefs, acts as an advisory board.

The 33-member Nitijela meets on Majuro twice yearly and elects one of its members to be president. In the Nitijela, the representation of women is usually by a solitary senator; women have always been under-represented in the parliament.

The Council of Iroij has a membership of 12. Its main responsibility is to refer back to the Nitijela any bill affecting customary law, traditional practice, land tenure or any related matter. The council can also express its opinion to the cabinet about matters of national interest.

In November 2003, the ruling United Democratic Party (UDP) was returned to power in national elections, successfully fending off the challenge of the Aelon Kein Ad Party (AKA). President Note was returned to office with 20 votes in the Nitijela.

The election mirrored the increasing tensions in Marshallese culture and society as the country moved into the 21st century. The AKA sought to champion and maintain many of the values of the traditional system; the UDP, on the other hand, was generally seeking to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. The challenge of retaining tradition in a rapidly urbanised setting will continue to be a major issue for national politics.

Marshall Islands in 1885, and until German administrators arrived in 1906 the islands were run by Jaluit Gesellschaft, a group of powerful German trading companies.

World Wars & Nuclear Testing

During WWI Japan declared war on Germany and occupied German Micronesia in September 1914. The islands remained under Japanese rule until the defeat of Japan by American forces in WWII, when the Marshalls (along with what are now the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Republic of Palau) became part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The US moved in immediately after the war, resettling islanders and starting atomic bomb experiments on Bikini and Eniwetok Atolls in 1946. Between 1946 and 1956 there were 67 powerful nuclear bomb tests; cumulatively, these tests were the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs being detonated every day for 12 years. Though the bombing is long over, the Marshallese continue to grapple with the lingering effects of radiation (see p283), and entire communities have had to be evacuated and resettled (see p281). Kwajalein Atoll was later established as a missile testing site.

Independence

The Congress of Micronesia, composed of all the US Trust Territories, was formed in 1965. Aspiring to political independence,

the Marshallese withdrew from the Congress of Micronesia in 1973, and their constitution became effective on 1 May 1979. Independence itself came in 1986, and membership of the UN in 1991.

At independence, the Marshallese government signed a 15-year Compact of Free Association (CFA) with the US which, as well as providing economic benefits to the Marshallese, allowed the US to continue to use Kwajalein as a missile testing site. In 2004 the second CFA, Compact II, was signed. This 20-year deal provides about US\$40 million per year in the forms of grants and a trust fund, the goal of which is to provide income to the government after the end of Compact II. The second CFA negotiations also included an agreement to extend the lease for use of the Kwajalein missile range until 2066 after the current lease between the RMI and the landowners expires in 2016. Landowners refused to sign a new lease, however, and they have asked for US\$19 million annually for rental of the majority of the world's largest atoll lagoon; the US has offered to pay only US\$15 million per year.

Apart from cash infusions from the US, many Marshallese rely on subsistence agriculture. Copra production, a mainstay of the country, is recovering from the altered weather patterns experienced during the late 1990s El Niño event (see p61) and is subsidised by the RMI to assist outer-island economies. An astounding 42 million coconuts are harvested annually, a figure

which could double in five years. Majuro's copra mill produces cosmetic soaps and oils, and some vehicles on Majuro run on coconut oil as a diesel substitute.

One of El Niño's more positive effects was the redirection of schools of tuna towards the eastern Marshalls – new fishing licence deals have seen revenue from foreign fishing licences soar. The RMI's 2 million sq km of ocean boasts a catch of around US\$50 million annually, and the country receives 5% of the landed value of each boat's catch. There is, of course, a concurrent need to monitor the fishing industry and beware of overfishing.

Cruise ships inject about US\$30,000 into the local economy each time they visit, boosting the sale of local goods and services, and encouraging craftspeople to continue practising their art.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

The Marshallese are a softly spoken, laid-back people, whose gentleness is reflected in their traditional greeting, 'Yokwe yuk', which means 'love to you'. Don't be surprised if the locals are economical with words and not as expressive during first encounters as other Pacific people; historically, their encounters with outsiders haven't always been happy. Don't be put off by an apparent lack of response to questions or requests; just wait a moment and see what happens.

Lifestyle

Marshallese society has always been stratified and, despite increasing Westernisation,

social status still derives from kinship and chiefs continue to wield a great deal of authority. Ownership rights to the land are vested with the Iroij (the hereditary chief of several clans), but this is a matrilineal society so women inherit the right to cultivate and use land occupied by the clan. Mutual reciprocity and extended family ties and obligations remain strong. The average family size is 7.8 people, the highest among the central Pacific countries, and women have an average of four children.

Lifestyle changes, coupled with changes in diet, have led to an increasing incidence of diabetes and related illnesses. Because of high wage earnings in non-traditional occupations, the development of a cash-based economy and the availability of imported Western food, food habits have undergone a change for the worse. The traditional – and nutritious – diet, consisting primarily of breadfruit, coconut, pandanus, taro and protein-rich fish, chicken and pork, has been overtaken by canned and processed foods. Alcohol, smoking and substance-abuse are on the rise, particularly among the young, as is the crime rate.

In general, the people are peace-loving, tolerant and secular. Although most clothing worn nowadays is Western-style, women and girls dress modestly and you will see older women wearing loose-fitting, floral-printed *muu-muu* dresses. It is advisable for women visitors not to display too much flesh in public; longish shorts and T-shirts are fine, but skimpy tops and short shorts will encourage people to think, especially if

STICK CHARTS

The Marshalls are particularly difficult to sight from the sea because of their low elevation and the distances between the atolls. While travelling between the islands, early inhabitants learned to read the patterns of the waves by watching for swells that would show when land was ahead.

Stick charts were used to teach the secrets of navigation, and were made by tying flat strips of wood together in designs that imitated the wave patterns. Shells were then attached to the sticks to represent the islands.

Three kinds of charts were used. The *mattang* showed wave patterns around a single island or atoll and was used to teach the basic techniques. The *medo* showed patterns around a small group of atolls and the *rebillit* mapped an entire chain, showing the relationships between the islands and the major ocean swells.

All the information contained on the stick charts was memorised and the charts themselves were not actually taken on journeys. While few present-day Marshallese understand how to read stick charts, many can still make them because of their popularity as souvenirs.

you're young, that you belong to a very old profession.

Population

The majority of the 65,000 islanders live on Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls, and over 95% are Marshallese. As elsewhere in the region, population growth is a huge problem, though the rate of increase declined from 4.5% in the 1980s to 1.5% by the end of the 1990s. About 40% of the population is aged under 14 years.

RELIGION

Christianity has played a significant role in shaping the attitude and behaviour of the people since missionaries first arrived in the islands during the 1830s. Most Marshallese are Christians – either Protestant or Catholic. As in much of the Pacific, evangelical churches are gaining popularity.

ARTS

Handicrafts of a consistently high quality are produced by Marshall Islanders, and their work is acclaimed across the Pacific. Originally developed in response to the requirements of a hard-working subsistence lifestyle, techniques such as weaving and model-making have since become sophisticated art forms.

Basketry & Weaving

Pandanus and coconut form the basis of the renowned craft of Marshallese weaving. Hats and bags, including the boxy white *kili* handbag made world-famous by former US first lady Jackie Kennedy in the 1960s, are made from *maan* (prepared

pandanus) or finely woven *kimej* (from immature coconut shoots).

Fans, made of *maan* and sometimes decorated with *kimej*, are both practical and beautiful. Work baskets for gathering and carrying food are made from *malwe*, sturdy coconut leaf-spines. Robust floor mats for sitting, and the finer sleeping mats, are made from *maan*.

Boat-making

Canoe-making was until recently a dying art but it has been revived in the Marshalls (see p273). As well as full-sized vessels, precisely made models based on authentic designs (including a steering oar and bailer), materials and techniques are an art form of their own. Stick charts (see p269), highly complex navigational tools used to sail between atolls, are also still crafted.

Dance

Of note is *jobwa*, the Marshallese stick dance; it's rarely performed and, traditionally, only when Iroij are in attendance. The dancers jump between 'dressed up' sticks about 1m long, which are flipped and twirled, accompanied by simple drumming. It's great to watch and action packed; if you hear of a stick dance happening, do everything you can to see it.

Usually performed at Christmas, the uniquely Marshallese 'beat' dances are also a delight for ears and eyes. Church-based – and highly competitive – groups perform a series of energetic dances interspersed with vigorous choral singing, during which gifts of sweets are distributed to (well, thrown at) the applauding congregation.

BEST EATING

Unsurprisingly, being in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the fresh fish is unsurpassed. The classic Marshallese diet combined fish, coconuts and breadfruit, and you'll still find these as staples in the outer islands. However, regular airline connections bring regular fresh freight deliveries, so fruit and vegetables are also on the menu. A range of influences over the years – Japanese, European, American and, more lately, Chinese and Korean – are reflected in the variety of food available.

- Blackened wahoo with a view at the Enra Restaurant (p277) in the Marshall Islands Resort.
- A sundowner and classic burgers at the Tide Table Restaurant (p277).
- Sunset pizza while watching the surf roll in at the Marshall Islands Club (p277).
- Any of the dishes at the White House (p277) Korean restaurant – delicious food, though less than atmospheric surroundings.

Literature

A small but active community of writers in the Marshalls self-published the first anthology of locally inspired writing, *Al In Aelon Majol*, in 2005. *The Trickster*, by former Majuro resident Jane Dowling, is a novel based on Marshallese legend.

Robert Louis Stevenson's 1890s classic of Pacific travel writing, *In the South Seas*, includes his observations of the Marshalls during his journey on the island steamer *Janet Nicoll*.

Music

Cha Nin Way and the Ukulele Boys are two popular local bands that play contemporary Marshallese music and lyrics. Most of the music you'll hear will be Marshallese versions of American hits, and Lamarin, RJ4 and Rosemelu (a band of women performers) can be heard at various venues around Majuro.

The ukulele is the current musical instrument of choice in the Marshalls; it's rare to see a bunch of kids walking down the road unaccompanied by strumming.

LANGUAGE

Marshallese is the official language, but (American) English is taught in schools and is widely understood.

Marshallese basics

Greetings.	<i>Yokwe yuk.</i> (Love to you.)
Hello/Goodbye.	<i>Ko na mauri.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ejet am mour?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Emman (komomol tata).</i>
Please.	<i>Joij.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Komomol tata.</i>
Yes.	<i>Aet.</i>
No.	<i>Jab.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

As well as concerns about climate change and rising sea level, the Marshalls have very specific environmental issues related to the US nuclear testing which took place in the country. Some of the islanders who were directly exposed to fallout, or who lived on contaminated land, have since died from radiation-related ailments, while others have lingering health problems. See the Bikini (p281), Enwetok (p282) and Rongelap (p283) sections for more information.

Geography

Almost all of the Marshalls' 1225 islands and islets are part of 29 coral atolls. The atolls run roughly north-south for 1290km in two nearly parallel chains about 240km apart. The eastern chain is Ratak, which means 'Towards Dawn', and the western chain is Ralik, 'Towards Sunset'. Although there's only 181 sq km of total land area, the Marshalls spread across 1,942,500 sq km of ocean. The widest island, Wotje, is less than 1.5km across; the highest elevation, just 10m, is on Likiep.

Ecology

The Marshalls' coral atoll environment supports a limited ecosystem of coconuts, pandanus and breadfruit. Coconut crabs are the largest native land animal, and sea birds hug the shoreline and cruise overhead. The most varied and plentiful wildlife is underwater, so getting off the land and into the sea is essential.

MAJURO ATOLL

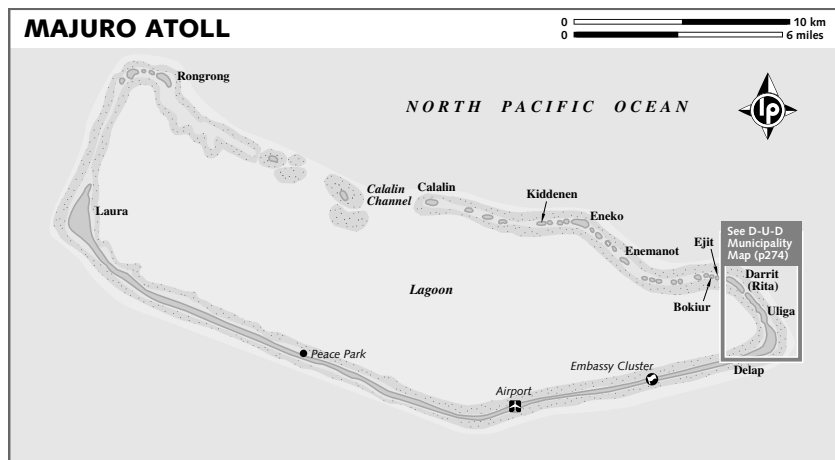
pop 30,000 / area 9.8 sq km

Oval-shaped Majuro Atoll is the nation's political, economic and transport centre, its 53 islets arcing in a slender 108km ribbon. When Robert Louis Stevenson visited Majuro in 1889 he called it the 'pearl of the Pacific', and while some of the lustrous

MAJURO IN TWO DAYS

Take an early-morning outrigger ride on the lagoon with **WAM** (p273), then pick up a picnic and head out to **Laura** (p275) to spend the day lolling on the beach and snorkelling on the shallow reef. Get back to D-U-D by mid-afternoon and enjoy a bit of culture at the **Alele Museum** (p274) before heading for sunset drinks and dinner on the veranda of the **Marshall Islands Resort** (p275).

Next morning, eat a hearty breakfast at **DAR Coffee Corner** (p276). Buy snacks and drinks at the Formosa Supermarket, then catch a boat across the lagoon to spend the day relaxing, walking and snorkelling on **Eneko** or **Kiddenen Islands** (p275). On return, shake the sand off your shoes and enjoy dinner and a sundowner at **Tide Table Restaurant** (p277).



may have worn thin, there's enough charm remaining to recall his description.

ORIENTATION

The larger islets are connected by a 45km paved road. Though it's heavily Westernised and the most populated of the Marshalls' atolls, Majuro retains a simple island flavour, especially if you get out of the downtown area. Take a trip to Laura at the far end of the palm-lined road for quiet beaches and a very pleasant drive.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

A limited selection of romances and thrillers are available, but serious readers should bring a supply of books.

Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel (☎ 625 4229; Delap) Has a book exchange.

Formosa Supermarket (Uliga)

Payless (Delap)

Tourist Trap (Delap)

Internet Access

Marshall Islands Resort (☎ 625 2525; Delap)

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA; ☎ 625 3363; Delap; ☎ 7am to midnight) The cheapest Internet café in town.

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; Uliga) Ask at reception.

Tourist Trap (Delap)

Medical Services

Majuro Clinic (☎ 625 6455) Opposite the Marshall Islands visitor information centre and in the clinic below

the RRE hotel. There's a dentist above the main post office in Uliga.

Majuro Hospital (emergency ☎ 625 4144' switchboard ☎ 625 3399; Delap)

Money

There's an ATM at the Formosa Supermarket and the Bank of Guam.

Bank of Guam (Delap)

Bank of the Marshall Islands (Uliga & Airport)

Post

Post office (Uliga) Next to the Formosa Supermarket.

Tourist Information

Marshall Islands visitor information centre

(☎ 625 6482; www.visitmarshallislands.com) The helpful Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (MIVA) is in the Small Island area of D-U-D.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

For information on flights to Majuro Atoll, see p286.

AIR

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) has an office on Small Island, and operates flights to Kwajalein (p286) and the outer islands (p280).

BOAT

State-run supply ships travel irregularly to the outer atolls, but private boats go more frequently. Drop in to the **Department**

of Transportation Office (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock for details about supply-ship sailing schedules. Only Arno is served by regular public boats (see p281).

If you are coming by yacht, check out www.micobeachyc.com, a great site that will lead you to just about all you need to know. On arrival, yachties should check in with Majuro's **Port Authority** (☎ 625 8269), then head to the Shoreline Dock at the RRE Hotel and get the lowdown from other yachties. See if long-termers Karen or Cary are around.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels provide a courtesy transfer. The taxi fare to and from town is US\$3.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Cars can be rented on Majuro for around US\$50 per day from the following car-rental agencies.

DAR (☎ 625 3174; Uliga) Next to the eponymous coffee shop.

Jemenaaj (☎ 625 8131; jemenaaj@yahoo.com)

Majuro Motors (☎ 625 4422)

MGAS Rentals (☎ 625 6559)

Pacific Wheels (☎ 625 7497)

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; Uliga)

TAXI

Shared taxis are abundant and cheap. The fare is 50c anywhere in the D-U-D area up to the Majuro Bridge, and US\$3 to the airport; go past the airport, however, and the price rockets. The rather endearing way of flagging down a taxi is to waggle as many fingers in the air as the number of seats you need; this way the taxi driver knows whether or not there is room for you.

D-U-D MUNICIPALITY

D-U-D – comprised of Delap, Uliga and Darrit (Rita) Islands – has the greatest concentration of commercial services. Government

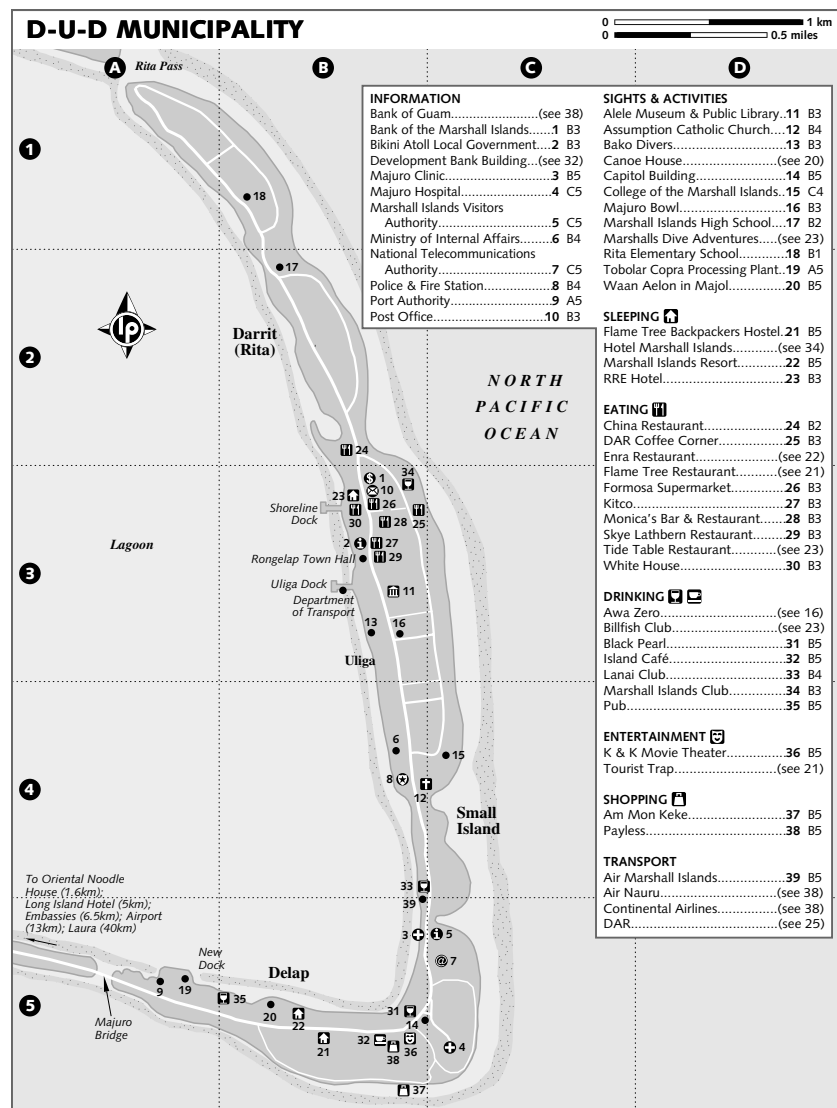
WAAN AELON IN MAJOL – CANOES OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

The ocean-going canoes that developed in the Marshalls are something close to genius. Living in relative geographic isolation and working with limited local materials – breadfruit logs and pandanus, mostly – the Marshallese crafted extraordinarily swift, stable, asymmetrically hulled vessels. Using their navigational expertise, the islanders could travel as far as Hawai'i in *walap*, ocean-going canoes up to 100 feet long and carrying 50 people. *Tibnol*, around 30 feet long, carried around 10 people and could fish both inside and outside the lagoon, and also travel between atolls. Small rowing *korkor*, sometimes fitted with a sail, could carry one or two people inside the lagoon's protected waters.

Until recently it seemed that traditional boat-building was another skill that would die out in the modern age, but there's been a resurgence of interest in the craft. So if you've ever wondered how it feels to ride in a traditionally built outrigger canoe, head down to the canoe house in Delap and, if the wind and waves are right, you can sail on a *korkor* on the lagoon with Waan Aelon in Majol (US\$20 for an hour).

Known universally as WAM, Waan Aelon in Majol means 'canoes of the Marshall Islands', and is a thriving nongovernmental organisation based on Majuro. Since the late 1990s, elderly master-builders from the outer islands have been sharing their skills with local young men (and one or two young women) and, together, re-creating some spectacular canoes. Traditional knowledge is 'owned' by individuals – one person might own the knowledge of navigation by the stars; another might be a master of the ocean swells or of the weather – and is closely guarded; it's an indication of how important Marshallese feel about preserving their boat-building that this knowledge is now being made available more widely.

WAM is providing much-needed employment and skills-training while also keeping tradition alive. The canoe houses and workshops are a living archive where old skills and materials – such as carving with timber – blend with the new, such as moulding with fibreglass. Among its plans for the future, WAM hopes to develop a small visitor centre, create a few low-key tourist bungalows on outer islands and implement some shoreline conservation initiatives. To find out how these plans are progressing, check out the WAM website (www.wamprogram.org) or email info@wamprogram.org.



offices are spread around Delap; particularly noticeable is the modern glass-encased US\$9 million Capitol building.

Next to the courthouse in Uliga is the **Alele Museum & Public Library** (☎ 625 3372; <http://members.tripod.com/~alelemuseum/Index.html>; ☎ 9am-noon, 1-4pm Mon-Fri), with small but good-quality exhibits of early Marshallese culture,

including stick charts, model canoes and shell tools.

On the town side of the bridge is the **Tobolar Copra Processing Plant** (☎ 625 3116). Like many Pacific islands, Majuro's first economic mainstay was copra – dried coconut meat – and its end-products of coconut oil and soaps can be found in the local shops.

Copra is still processed on Majuro; if you'd like to see how it's done, call ahead and book a time to visit.

People commonly wade across the reef to the islands north of Rita at low tide. The pleasant beaches of **Enemanot**, several islands beyond Rita, are popular for weekend day trips by boat to picnic and snorkel; ask at the visitor information centre (p272) or your hotel about getting there.

Laura, a quiet green refuge 40km from D-U-D, is the atoll's agricultural centre. Its tip is fringed with a gorgeous white-sand beach, Majuro's finest, that's popular for weekend picnics. Like all Marshallese land it's privately owned, but it's open to the public at US\$2 per person. The Japanese-built **Peace Park** halfway to Laura has a memorial to those who died in WWII. You can catch a public shuttle bus to Laura from the RRE Hotel car park every other hour during the week (US\$2.50). Public transport is more erratic at weekends; another option is to charter a taxi for around US\$20 one way.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Tropical fish, white-tipped and grey reef sharks and a few wrecks make Majuro a fine dive spot, and the water gets clearer the further you are from Rita. A popular dive site is Calalin Channel – also known as Shark Alley – but beware of currents. For an overview of Majuro's myriad diving opportunities, see p76.

The most experienced dive operator in town, and the one to go for if you fancy a shark dive, is Jerry Ross at **Bako Divers** (☎ 247 7254; www.bakodivers.com). He runs a full sales, rental and repair service for any dive gear.

Marshall's Dive Adventures (MDA; ☎ 625 3483; mda@e-mit.net), another excellent operation, specialises in Japanese divers; contact Satoshi Yoshii. MDA also sells and rents snorkel gear.

Local two-tank dives cost around US\$100, maybe a bit extra if you need to rent all the gear. Dive certification classes are available with both operators for around US\$350.

Other Water Sports

For decent **snorkelling**, head over to one of the islands in the small chain west of Rita. You should be able to arrange a pick-up/drop-off on one of the boats that take

TEETHING TROUBLE *Virginia Jealous*

On the way back from Laura, feeling peckish, we stopped at a roadside snack stall for a bag of boiled pandanus fruit. In shades of orange, firm-fleshed, sweet and strongly scented, it looked just the thing to refresh us in the midday heat.

Delicious it was, too. But what we'd failed to realise was that the aforementioned sweet, firm flesh was embedded in a fibrous seed not unlike a human hair ball. With fibres lodged firmly between every tooth and incapable of speaking, we picked and sucked our teeth in companionable silence all the way home.

overnighters to either Kiddenen or Eneko Islands; a return trip is between US\$20 and US\$30. Snorkellers without boat transport will find a shallow coral reef at Laura Beach.

For **sport fishing** contact MIVA (p286) for a list of charter boats available. The **Marshall's Billfish Club** (☎ 625 7491; billfish@ntamar.net) holds several tournaments a year; a record tuna caught in 2001 weighed in at a massive 323kg!

SLEEPING

Majuro has several decent hotels, and most of them provide free airport transfers.

D-U-D Municipality

Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel (☎ 625 4229; journal@ntamar.net; dm/s/d US\$15/25/35; ☎ ☎ ☎) Easily the best deal in town for the budget traveller – in fact the only deal at present – the Flame Tree will suit travellers who want to meet locals and have fun. There's a clean and tidy dormitory set up at the back, complete with kitchenette and lounge area, shared toilet and a few rooms with bathrooms. The rooms – not suitable for light sleepers! – are behind the bar, a happening place with live music on Thursday and Friday.

Marshall Islands Resort (☎ 625 2525; www.marshallislandsresort.com; r US\$130; ☎ ☎ ☎) Slap on the waterfront, and nominally top of the range as all rooms have unobstructed lagoon views. When we visited in 2005, the exteriors were grubby and dilapidated, the rooms were tatty and the pool (Majuro's one and only) was murky. Hopefully, a

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; readmin@ntamar.net; r from US\$90, garden bungalows US\$150; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Hotel Robert Reimers could do with a bit of tender loving care, but it's comfortable and clean enough. The cheaper rooms are a bit tatty (carpet gets nasty very quickly when there's sea and sand outside), but they all have balconies. The garden bungalows are delightful – you can plop right into the lagoon off the steps at the back. The main attraction is location location location; set between shops and the Shoreline Dock, and at the water's edge, it's a great place for sitting and watching the world go by.

much-needed facelift is on the horizon. Seasonal discounts are offered, sometimes down to US\$85.

Long Island Hotel (☎ 247 6789; lihotel@ntamar.com; r without/with water views US\$65/85; ☎ ☎) On the way to the airport, this well-appointed, Chinese-run hotel opened in 2005.

Hotel Marshall Islands (☎ 625 3000; journal@ntamar.net) Above the Marshall Islands Club, this place was closed indefinitely for renovations when we last visited. If it's up and running again, it's a good option on the ocean side of town.

Surrounding Islands

There are several opportunities to get off the urban strip (such as it is) and experience a slice of the small island life without risking your onward flight bookings.

Eneko Island Cottages (☎ 625 5131; readmin@ntamar.net; cottage US\$50) Owned by the Reimers family, these two delightful cottages have the run of Eneko Island's beach and shallow reef. There's a fully equipped and insect-screened shared cooking and sitting area; you'll need to take drinking water. Return boat trip US\$20.

Serendipper Island Resort (☎ 625 3483; info@e-mit.net; private use of island overnight US\$480) Come to this resort next to Bokiur Island if you want to splash out. Power is generated by a system of wind and solar generation; the back-up generator is run on local coconut oil. There's a composting toilet and cleaning is done using environmentally friendly products. There's just one single, sizeable

and stylish bungalow on the island, and, of course, the beach is private. Boat transfers are included in the price.

Kiddenen Island (☎ 625 3251; journal@ntamar.net; s US\$30) Budget travellers seeking something similar to Serendipper could try the large solar-powered lodge on tiny Kiddenen Island (also known as Three Bag Island – a somewhat disparaging reference to the annual amount of copra harvested from its small grove of coconut trees!). It's a great spot to chill out for a few days with a good book and a friend. There are kayaks for use, and decent snorkelling. You can walk to other islands at low tide, but bear in mind that all land is owned by someone – if you can get permission to walk around from someone, do so. There's rainwater to drink and a freezer to keep your wine and beer cold, though you'll need to take your rubbish back with you. The return boat trip is US\$30.

EATING

You should enjoy the cosmopolitan choice of food on Majuro – it's the exception rather than the rule for central Pacific countries. If you're after silver service you're in the wrong place, but good fresh food cooked in the style of several different countries is easily available, and the supermarkets stock a wide range of food for self-caterers.

DAR Coffee Corner (☎ 625 3174; big breakfast US\$4; ☎ ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, Sun to 6pm; ☎ ☎) The excellent DAR, located behind the Formosa Supermarket, is simple, clean, cool and cheap. Fluffy 75c pancakes are an unbeatable morning starter, and local food served buffet-style from lunchtime onwards is excellent.

Formosa Supermarket (Uluga) The deli attached to the Formosa Supermarket has ordinary burgers and sandwiches from US\$2 to US\$3, and decent hot buffet lunches. The food can be packed into picnic containers if you'd rather eat elsewhere (and you probably will, as the ambience isn't exactly great).

Kitco (☎ 625 3208; lunch US\$4; ☎ ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) Almost opposite the Rongelap Town Hall, this classic old-style Majuro diner serves good square meals for the budget traveller. Look hard – it's a long, low anonymous, well, *shed* with the sign missing.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

White House (☎ 625 2668; meals US\$7.50; ☎ ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The décor won't thrill you but the traditional and very tasty Korean food will. Try the fresh seafood combinations: the tuna steaks come with rice and *kim chi*, and a delicious surprise of mushrooms and broccoli on the side. It's popular with Asian tour groups, so you might want to eat early or late to avoid the rush.

Skye Lathbern Restaurant (☎ 625 3695; mains US\$5; ☎ ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Next to Kitco, this place also serves up a good cheap feed, but the coffee could be better.

Monica's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 625 6686; mains US\$10; ☎ ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) Upstairs in Uluga, Monica's serves great Chinese food, cooked by a real Chinese cook, and it has a well-stocked bar. Happy hour is 4pm to 8pm, with free appetisers, and there are private rooms if you fancy a bit of karaoke without embarrassing yourself too much.

Flame Tree Restaurant (☎ 625 4229; lunch US\$5, dinner US\$8-14; ☎ ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The restaurant at the Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel serves a particularly fine lunch, with a wide selection including pizzas.

Oriental Noodle Restaurant (☎ 247 2088; main courses US\$5-13; ☎ ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) Head over the Majuro Bridge for good eat-in or take-away Chinese food. Vegetarian options are available.

China Restaurant (☎ 625 7544; meals US\$8; ☎ ☎ ☎ lunch & dinner) This pragmatically named place can get pretty loud and smoky when there are Chinese boat crews in town (as can the Oriental Noodle).

Tide Table Restaurant (☎ 625 3250; burgers US\$4; ☎ ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Upstairs at the RRE Hotel, this popular place serves excellent food – the classic burgers and salad are great – and has wide lagoon views. The bar is a good spot to catch up on local news, and the drinks are reasonably priced.

Enra Restaurant (☎ 625 2525) In the Marshall Islands Resort, the Enra serves fine food to accompany the wonderful lagoon views. Sunday brunch from 10.30am to 2.30pm is popular, as are the weekly pizza nights and lunch buffets, using local ingredients and fresh fish.

DRINKING

Majuro has a fair bit of nightlife. Marshallese night spots are very dark affairs, and the later it gets, the darker they get. Nothing really kicks off until 11pm, Thursday to Saturday.

Island Café (Mon-Sat) In the Development Bank building, this is the closest you'll get to café culture on Majuro; Starbucks aficionados will love it.

Flame Tree (☎ 625 4229) This place is usually rocking with live music from an accomplished Gilbertese musician on Thursday and Friday nights, and busy with locals most nights.

Long Island Hotel Club (☎ 247 6789) If you are staying out this way the club at the Long Island Hotel is the place to go, but bear in mind that taxis are hard to get past the bridge after about 10pm.

The Marshall Islands Club is good for an early evening drink and famous for its pizza – great for a feed early on in the big night out.

For night owls, Awa Zero, over the Majuro Bowl, often attracts a good crowd and has a reasonable dance floor. The Black Pearl, opposite the capitol building, has an OK house band, and the pub, on the bend in the road before the port area, hosts a late-night disco with almost exclusively Marshallese or Pacific island sounds; this place can get pretty wild and is not for the faint-hearted. Club Lanai near Air Marshall Islands office is very hit and miss, but if it's rocking, it's rolling.

Taxis run all night in D-U-D, so you shouldn't get caught out late without wheels. You can always walk home to your hotel; it's pretty safe, though women will probably feel more comfortable in a group of at least two.

ENTERTAINMENT Cinema

K & K Movie Theater (☎ 625 5615) Next to Payless in Delap; call or check out the *Marshall Islands Journal* for the current programme.

Sport

You'll probably find a ready partner for a night's bowling at the **Majuro Bowl** (☎ 625 3797). More informally, join an evening basketball game with the locals; there are courts on many street corners.

SHOPPING

Excellent Marshallese handicrafts include stick charts, carved models of outrigger canoes and intricate weavings such as baskets, wall hangings and purses made from pandanus leaves, coconut fronds and cowrie shells. There are a few local handicraft kiosks around Assumption Catholic Church, or try **Am Mon Keke** (☎ 625 5335). The main streets are lined with craft stalls if there's a cruise ship in town.

Some beautiful black pearl necklaces and earrings are for sale – mostly in hotel gift shops – but don't buy clam shells or black coral; these prohibited items are listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Formosa Supermarket and Payless have a decent selection of souvenirs. Tourist Trap under the Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel also has some handicrafts.

KWAJALEIN ATOLL

pop 10,000 (excluding US military) / area 16.8 sq km
Nowhere in Micronesia is the US military presence so pronounced as on Kwajalein Atoll, a US\$4 billion space tracking and missile defence facility operated by the US Department of Defense.

Measured by lagoon size Kwajalein is the world's largest coral atoll, its 97 islands surrounding an immense 2175 sq km body of water. The original main base for the US nuclear test programme, and an essential component in the development of the 'Star Wars' missile defence system, Kwajalein has been at the heart of US weapons of mass destruction development for nearly 60 years. The lagoon, sometimes described as 'the world's largest catcher's mitt', is the target and splashdown point for intercontinental ballistic missile tests (ICBMs); many come from the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, 6760km away, a distance covered in under 40 minutes. The Kwajalein Missile Range (officially called US Army Kwajalein Atoll, or USAKA) includes Kwajalein Island to the south, Roi-Namur Island in the north and some smaller islands between the two. Two-thirds of the lagoon is termed the Mid Atoll Corridor, and access to this area is severely restricted.

KWAJALEIN ISLAND

About 2700 US civilian contract workers and their families live on Kwajalein Island (Kwaj). Kwaj is US suburbia transplanted, with a golf course, swimming pools, baseball diamonds, tennis courts and the air-conditioned Marshallese Cultural Center.

A glimpse from the airport of these most un-Pacific luxuries is likely to be the only taste most visitors will get of Kwaj, as the island is absolutely off limits except as a transit point to neighbouring Ebeye. To overnight on Kwaj, you must have an official 'sponsor' who can arrange for your stay, so unless you have specific clearance to remain on Kwajalein Island (and this is very hard to get) you will immediately be escorted to the boat dock to catch a landing craft shuttle or water taxi to Ebeye. Irrespective of your nationality, Kwaj police do not have a reputation for hospitality, and you'll need to get off the island as soon as you can.

If you *are* an official visitor to Kwaj, WWII relics include a well-preserved bunker and a manicured Japanese cemetery, site of a mass grave for Japanese soldiers defending the island.

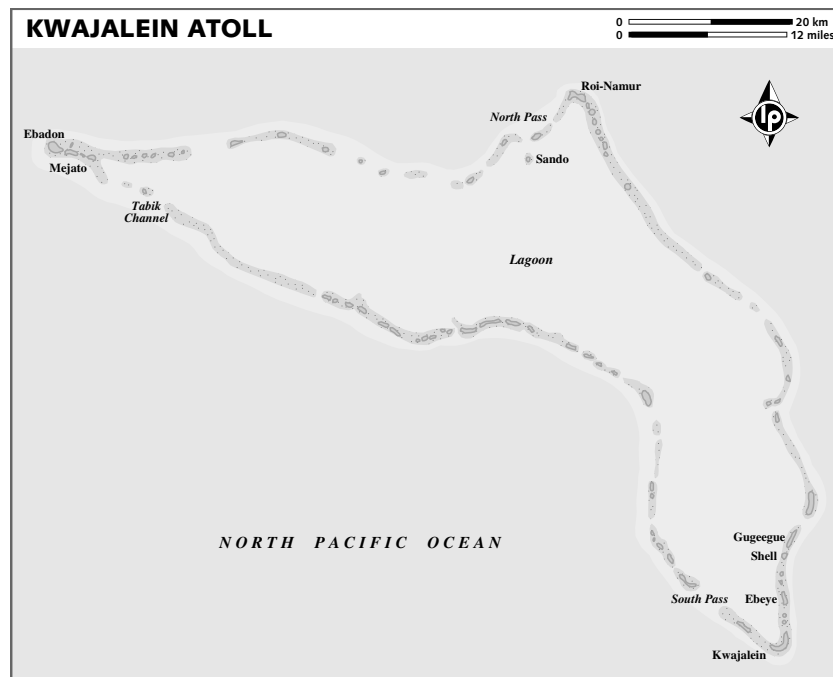
Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies between Majuro and Kwajalein on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday (US\$310 return). Continental Micronesia flights also stop at Kwaj (see p286).

Flights are unable to land when missile tests are scheduled, and advance notice is usually very brief (if it only affects AMI it's likely to be given that day). Flying between Majuro and Kwaj is like crossing a border, so you will need to take your passport along with you.

EBEYE

Over 1300 Marshallese labourers work on Kwajalein Island and live on 31-hectare Ebeye Island, 5km to the north, where population density is higher than in Hong Kong. The workers support an additional 12,000 or so relatives and friends in mostly very simple accommodation; many are one-room shacks and lean-tos of plywood, tin and plastic sheeting, jammed together in tenement conditions with little water. Residents haul drums of drinking water in from Kwaj on the ferry; piped water is

KWAJALEIN ATOLL



only available at certain times, so fill up containers when it comes. The electricity supply is getting better but blackouts are still common.

Needless to say, Ebeye is not a big tourist spot, but the people are very friendly, especially the children. It's different.

Information

There is a post office on Ebeye.

Air Marshall Islands (☎ 329 3036) The office is near the Triple J store.

Bank of the Marshall Islands (☎ 329 3603)

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA;

☎ 24 hr) Towards the southern end of the island. For calls to Kwaj go to the Kwaj dock, where they're much cheaper.

Sights & Activities

Kwajalein's lagoon contains more than 30 WWII-era Japanese ships. The diving highlight is the wreck of the German pocket battleship *Prinz Eugen*, which served as an escort to the *Bismarck* during its legendary WWII battle against the British *Hood*. Dive with Hideo Milne, if you can find him, as he knows the wrecks intimately; ask around

near the Mobil tanks lagoon-side for his small store. **Rongelap Expeditions** (☎ 625 7872; www.rongelapexpeditions.com) runs dive tours on Kwajalein's wrecks.

An 8km stroll up the causeway to **Gugegue** (googeegoo) will take you through tiny islands, some inhabited and some not. Ebeye has some Japanese remnants from WWII (look in the bush at the south end), and once you get to Gugegue you can see the **launch site** of the Star Wars interceptors on Meck Island to the north, if you look closely. If you walk along the shore near the pass at the end, you can usually find **missile pieces** made of some very fancy metals, such as titanium. There is good snorkelling at several spots along the causeway.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two hotels on Ebeye and both are overpriced and often overbooked – you need to call well in advance. Add US\$2 plus 10% tax to the prices given here.

Anrohasa Hotel (Fountain's Hotel; ☎ 329 3161; r US\$95; ☎) The rooms at this two-storey hotel have a refrigerator, phone and TV.

The hotel frequently has no water, which makes life interesting. A minimum US\$100 deposit is required. The on-site restaurant has a varied menu with US, Chinese and Japanese dishes.

Place Hotel (☎ 329 3210; s/d US\$50/60) In the middle of the island, past the AMI office, this place takes cash only. The rooms are nothing fancy, but it does have its own water so at least the toilet usually works. The owner is an ex-Kwajalein senator, who is good for a yarn if he's on the island and can fill in some of the gaps in your knowledge of Kwaj and the situation there.

Bob's Island Restaurant, sitting above the Triple J store and a block from the Anrohasa Hotel, has a water view, good prices and Ebeye's best food. A couple of good Filipino restaurants are usually operating somewhere on the island; ask locally. The Triple J store near the Ebeye dock has groceries. Signs are often rare on Ebeye, so it's easy to miss places; ask for directions.

Nightlife consists of the Recycle Bar disco on Friday and Saturday nights at the Anrohasa Hotel, and anything that might be happening at Mon La Mike. All are within a block of the Triple J store.

Getting There & Around

To get to Ebeye you'll need to travel via Kwajalein Island (p278). On return, you must show your ticket at the Kwajalein Dock before you can proceed to the airport; if you have an open ticket, obtain a print-out of your flight times. Don't expect any favours or flexibility from the security staff, they did not come here to make friends.

OUTER ISLANDS

In the quiet, traditional villages away from Majuro and Kwajalein, the people are friendly and a few usually speak English. Although some outer islanders still use the traditional *korkor* canoe (see p273), *boom-booms* (motorboats) are steadily gaining in popularity. Both kinds of boats are used for frequent *jambos* (trips or picnics) to uninhabited islands of the atoll.

Visitors to the outer islands are usually looking for great dive sites or decent sport-fishing, so if either are your thing you'll probably have to take a package tour. Serious

military historians planning to tour the islands should contact local WWII buff Matt Holly on Majuro on ☎ 625 3669. If you're pretty self-sufficient, can live without the nightclub scene and have time to simply island hop and hang out, the outer islands will suit you just fine.

Although many atolls do not have formal arrangements for visitors, the Marshallese are generally hospitable. Only a few atolls – including Arno, Bikini, Rongelap, Jaluit and Likiep – have guesthouses. Elsewhere you will need to radio ahead to the mayor of the island you wish to visit, and arrange for something to be set up, possibly in an island council resthouse or schoolhouse. Contact MIVA (p272) for advice about how to do this. Most outer islands lack electricity, running water and flush toilets.

Expect to eat fresh local foods like breadfruit, pumpkin, taro and fish prepared by your hosts. Usually a few stores stock rice, flour, tea and canned meats. Most outer islands are alcohol-free. If you are offered food it is considered very rude to refuse – at least have a taste – and as sharing of food is customary you may be asked to share a bite. Some fish can be poisonous through ciguatera toxin, which affects reef fish and those that feed on them; local knowledge is essential here, so do check before you eat a fish you caught. Barracuda is a no-no.

The atolls described in this section have been selected for their comparative ease of access and availability of accommodation, or for their historical interest – but if you're lucky enough to be offered the chance to visit any others, jump at it!

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies to most of the Marshalls' inhabited atolls once a week. Return fares from Majuro are US\$230 to Wotje, US\$280 to Likiep, US\$530 to Bikini, US\$710 to Enewetok, US\$185 to Jaluit, US\$122 to Mili and US\$450 to Rongelap. Flights usually hop across several islands at a time.

Boat

The RMI has several supply ships which service the outer islands, dropping off supplies and picking up copra. Passenger prices

are cheap and so is the accommodation; experienced budget travellers will do fine. Scheduling information is available from the **Department of Transportation Office** (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock on Majuro. Arno is the only atoll that's served by regular public boats (see below).

Charters can be arranged to Arno and Likiep – contact MIVA (p272). If you are planning boat trips, give yourself lots of time – like weeks – and be prepared to miss your plane.

Yachties should check out www.meico.beachyc.com for details of destinations. Radio ahead from Majuro before visiting outer islands, and check in with the mayor of each atoll when arriving in the lagoon.

GETTING AROUND

The outer islands have few land vehicles but usually at least one motorboat. Trips to other islands within the atoll can generally be negotiated for a reasonable price. It should also be fairly easy to get someone to take you fishing, lobstering or coconut-crab hunting.

ARNO ATOLL

pop 2069 / area 13 sq km

With 133 islands, Arno is the closest atoll to Majuro (just 14km away) and the only one served by regular public boats. The Longar area in Arno is famous for its 'love school', where young women were once taught how to perfect their sexual techniques. The waters off Longar Point are known for their superb deep-sea fishing, where yellowfin tuna, marlin, *mahimahi* and sailfish abound.

Accommodation is in the RRE **cottage** (☎ 625 3250; treadmin@ntamar.net; per person US\$25). A public boat to Arno leaves from the RRE Hotel Shoreline Dock on Majuro at 11am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (US\$10 one way, plus US\$2 per bag).

BIKINI ATOLL

pop 13 / area 6 sq km

Home to the earliest known habitation in Micronesia, Bikini was selected by President Truman as the site for the first peacetime explosion of the atomic bomb.

Early in 1946 the US military governor of the Marshalls met with the Bikini islanders to inform them that their islands were needed for 'a greater good', and for experiments that

'would end all wars'. After deliberations, Bikini's Chief Juda – still awed by the US firepower that had recently defeated the Japanese Imperial Navy – responded that if the US wanted to use Bikini for the 'benefit of all mankind' his people would go elsewhere.

Bikini's 161 residents were relocated on the assurance that they could move back once the tests were over – at the time, they thought this would be about three months. A few months later the US exploded a nuclear device 152m over Bikini's lagoon, the first of 23 nuclear tests that would leave the islands uninhabitable, Bikinians displaced and their society irreparably disrupted.

The Bikinians were first moved to Rongerik Atoll, a place of ill omen in Marshallese legend. They became ill from eating poisonous fish in the lagoon and nearly starved from inadequate food supplies. Two years later they were moved to Kwajalein Atoll, and later to Kili Island. In the 1970s the Bikinians were told it was safe to move back home and a resettlement programme began. Although two entire islands had been blown away and the others were debris-covered and treeless (making a mockery of Bikini's name, which roughly translates as 'land of many coconuts'), the islanders remained on Bikini and tried to get their lives back in order.

In 1978 US tests showed that by eating food grown in the caesium-contaminated soil the Bikinians had collected huge levels of radioactivity in their bodies, so they were moved back to Kili once again. It was later reported that the relocation programme had been bungled by the US: the islanders were supposed to have been placed on Eneu Island, the other main island in Bikini Atoll, not on Bikini Island itself, which is eight times more radioactive.

The final cleanup of Bikini will require replacing all the current topsoil with imported soil, but even so there are likely to be long-term problems when it comes to eating anything grown on the island. The cost of that procedure alone is about US\$200 million, nearly double the amount of money originally allocated to the entire cleanup project. Eneu, which the cleanup workers are using as a base, is currently considered safe.

Bikini Atoll's local government operates from a building in Uliga. Go into the lobby and check out the nuclear murals if you

want to know what the Marshallese think of nuclear testing, and visit www.bikiniatoll.com for more information.

Activities DIVING

Thanks to its ominous WWII and nuclear history, Bikini is one of Micronesia's premier dive spots. One highlight is the USS *Saratoga*, the world's only diveable aircraft carrier and largest diveable wreck, which still holds visible planes and racks of bombs. Another memorable dive is the *Nagato*, a Japanese battleship from whose deck Admiral Yamamoto ordered his warplanes to attack Pearl Harbor. You need to be at least a PADI advanced diver to dive here. Grey reef sharks abound, and spotting a silvertip on the wrecks is not uncommon.

Dive trips are organised by **Bikini Atoll Divers** (www.bikiniatoll.com), owned by the Bikini Atoll Council and operating since 1996. The company's aim is to both manage the numbers of people who visit the atoll, and to use income from Bikini's only asset for the local community. One-week packages costing US\$2750 per person include 12 dives, lodging and meals on Bikini at the eight-unit Bikini Atoll Resort and one night at the RRE Hotel on Majuro. The Bikini Atoll Resort has simple rooms, air-con from generator electricity, hot and cold water, and a recreation room with a VCR, pool table and table tennis. The price does not include the air fare from Majuro to Bikini (about US\$430 return). Check out www.bikiniatoll.com for more details.

SPORTFISHING

Sportfishing (mostly catch and release) on Bikini is good, with skipjack, yellowfin and trevally in the surrounding water. All visits are one-week packages, similar to the diving package, and cost around US\$3000; you cannot combine fishing and dive packages. Trips are usually booked up months in advance, though you may get lucky and be offered a spare space at the last minute. Contact **Brenda Waltz** (☎ 625 4265; saratoga@ntamar.net) for details.

ENEWETOK ATOLL

pop 853 / area 6 sq km

Enewetok islanders were evacuated to harsh and uninhabited Ujelang Atoll before atomic bomb tests began in 1948.

Over a 10-year period, 43 atomic bombs were detonated from Enewetok. A 9.8 megaton hydrogen bomb that exploded in 1958 on Enewetok blasted a 1.5km-wide, 6m-deep crater in the lagoon and fractured the rock to a depth of 426m beneath the crater's surface. Ironically, '*enewetok*' means 'island that moves', a name given long before the nuclear tests actually did move the island.

Between 1977 and 1980 a US\$218 million nuclear cleanup programme was undertaken. In part, this involved 700 US army personnel removing the top of Runit Island to a depth of half a metre, the contaminated soil being sealed under a 45cm concrete cap in a bomb crater. In 1980, after 33 years of exile, the islanders were allowed to return to islands in the southern part of the atoll.

Enewetok's local government operates from the Marshall Islands Development Bank building in Delap on Majuro, and runs its own ship; contact the local government office if you plan to visit.

JALUIT ATOLL

pop 1669 / area 11.4 sq km

Traditionally, Jaluit was the home of the high chief of the southern Rakik Islands, but by 1900 its main island, Jabwor, had become the well-established capital of the then German Protectorate of the Marshall Islands. It was administered by the Jaluit Gesellschaft, the German concession company that had been formed by the merger of all German trading interests in the Marshalls. The postal steamer *Germania* called regularly at Jaluit and enabled mail and passenger connections with Sydney and Hong Kong, tying Jaluit firmly into the network of world trade. A severe cyclone in June 1905 destroyed most of the German settlement on Jaluit, leaving it little time to recover before the ravages of WWI.

When the Japanese took over in 1914, they fortified the islands and started a fishing industry; the ruins of Japanese buildings and bunkers still remain. You can also see the wreck of the ship *Alfred* on the reef at Jabwor Pass, where it sank in 1899. Jaluit Atoll's planes and shipwrecks make some of the Marshalls' best diving.

For a close-to-nature experience, the **Jaluit Eco-Resort** (house per day US\$30) is definitely the way to go. The resort's five traditional houses each contain one or two queen-size

beds and shared facilities. Bring your own food or arrange meals with villagers if you fancy a local diet. Bottled water is available, and solar lighting, rainwater showers and mosquito nets are provided. Guided tours of mangroves, WWII relics and reefs are available, as is a traditional sailing canoe tour. The eco-resort is run in cooperation with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) as part of the Jaluit Marine Protected Area. Book through the EPA (☎ 625 3483; eparmi@ntamar.net) or the visitor information centre on Majuro (☎ 625 6482).

There may also be rooms at the **Jawoj Hotel** (☎ on Majuro 625 3829; meccorp@ntamar.net; per person US\$50; ☎), run by the Marshall Electric Company, with four double-occupancy units and two shared bathrooms. **Betto's Store** (Antari Jason; ☎ 625 3450; Majuro; per person US\$50) also has two small units.

LIKIEP ATOLL

pop 527 / area 10.3 sq km

Likiep is made up of about 60 islands around a shallow lagoon, with some houses built in Western style with porches and railings. In 1877 Jose deBrum, a Portuguese harpooner who arrived aboard a US whaleship, and Adolf Capelle, a German trader, bought Likiep Atoll from the high chief. They married Marshallese women and started profitable copra and ship-building companies. Look out for the **deBrum House**, built by Joachim deBrum in 1904. It's the only intact German-period wooden building in all of Micronesia, and retains much of its original furnishings. DeBrums and Capelles still own Likiep and operate it as a copra plantation. The sale of the island remains contentious, as current traditional leaders say that the sale document was written in a foreign language that the high chief wasn't able to read.

The **Likiep Plantation Hotel** (☎ 625 2229; likiephaus@yahoo.com) has 12 rooms and a restaurant. At the time of writing it had been closed for a while, but hopefully will be operating again at some stage. Alternately, arrange stays through the visitor information centre office on Majuro (☎ 625 6482).

MALOELAP ATOLL

pop 856 / area 8.8 sq km

Tarao Island (Tarawa Island), in Maloelap Atoll, was the main Japanese airbase in the eastern Marshalls during WWII; 3000

troops were stationed here. There are numerous twisted wreckages of Zeros and Betty bombers, pillboxes and guns, as well as the remains of an airfield, a narrow-gauge railroad and a radio station. The southern tip of the island has coastal defence guns, including a 127mm anti-aircraft gun and a Howitzer on wheels. Many relics are hidden under thick jungle foliage, so it's useful to have a guide.

Off Tarao's lagoon beach the Japanese freighter *Toroshima Maru* lies partly submerged, where it was sunk by US bombers. Periscopes and the mast can still be seen, but it's pretty well stripped, except for some live depth charges.

MILI ATOLL

pop 1032 / area 15.8 sq km

Friendly and accessible with fine beaches, Mili is a good choice if you want to visit an outer atoll. As a major WWII Japanese base, Mili has abandoned weapons, Japanese and US war planes and bombed-out buildings still scattered around. An intriguing story about the disappearance of aviator Amelia Earhart has her sighted under Japanese custody on Mili long after she vanished in 1937 (see p752).

The whole lagoon side of Mili Island is trimmed with sandy white beaches that are good for snorkelling, and at low tide you can walk along the reef to the neighbouring islands. The bad news, however, is that, while it's close to Majuro and pleasant to visit, the clam farm and small hotel that used to draw visitors are presently closed; check with the visitor information centre on Majuro (☎ 625 6482) for news of their current status.

RONGELAP ATOLL

pop 20 / area 8 sq km

'Bravo', the immensely powerful hydrogen bomb that exploded on Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954, sent clouds of deadly radioactivity towards inhabited Rongelap Atoll, 160km to the east. The fallout came down as powdery ash six hours after the blast. Signs of radiation sickness, including nausea, hair loss and severe burns, occurred within hours, yet it wasn't until three days after the blast that the US military evacuated the 82 inhabitants of Rongelap to Kwajalein.

The Rongelapese were returned to their atoll in 1957, but in 1985 they were self-evacuated with the help of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*, which moved the people to a new home on Mejato Island in Kwajalein Atoll, 177km to the south. Testimony by atomic energy officials revealed that the day before the bomb test a warning from US meteorologists of a wind shift in the direction of Rongelap had been ignored, and in 1995 the US established a US\$45 million trust fund for the Rongelapese. Rehabilitation of the island began soon afterwards, and a dock, power plant, desalination plant and airfield have been constructed, a precursor to possible resettlement. If people do go back to live on the island, they will need to import all their food to avoid radiation. The Rongelapese have continuing health problems – almost 75% of the people who were under the age of 10 on the day of the blast have had surgery for thyroid tumours. Do not eat local food from Rongelap.

Diving at Rongelap is spectacular if it is fish, not ships, that you want to see. The island itself is very pleasant, with the old church restored to its previous glory. The presence of some decent infrastructure means that you get an outer-island atmosphere with modern facilities, an unusual mixture.

Rongelap's local government has invested in a small cruise ship, the MV *Oleanda*, previously on service in Fiji and Tonga. The ship accommodates 18 guests, and packages include all meals and diving, kayaking and snorkelling off the boat. Contact **Rongelap Expeditions** (☎ 625 7872; www.rongelapexpeditions.com) for more details.

WOTJE ATOLL

pop 866 / area 8.2 sq km

Wotje, the main island in Wotje Atoll, is covered end to end with WWII remnants, including a large Japanese gun in the centre of the village that can still be moved on its pivot. The lagoon is also full of wreckage, including a few ships. The lagoon beaches of Wotje Island are quite beautiful and relatively clean. The island recently had a generator installed, so some power is available. The Litko Company may have a room, or you could contact the mayor. Contact MIVA (p272) for further information.

MARSHALL ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are several decent, if not luxurious, hotels on Majuro; one or two low-key, eco-friendly island resorts; and simple, local-style cottages on the more regularly visited islands. Outer islands generally host visitors in an island resthouse or with a local family.

Add a national hotel tax of 8% and a local tax of US\$3 per room per night to the rates quoted in this chapter.

ACTIVITIES

The Marshall Islands have excellent diving and snorkelling; the former is particularly good on Bikini, Rongelap, Kwajalein and some of the other outer islands. See p275 for dive operators and p76 for information about diving in the Marshall Islands. There's surfing and windsurfing for the experienced and adventurous, though you'll need a bit of local knowledge. There's also game fishing, with tours and boats available for charter, and plenty of WWII relics on land and underwater.

PRACTICALITIES

- Billed for years as 'the world's worst newspaper', Majuro's weekly *Marshall Islands Journal* (journal@ntamar.net) is essential reading for local information; it comes out on Fridays.
- Majuro receives cable TV, including CNN and BBC World. Ebeye gets US military TV, a strange and unique combination of news, soaps and military propaganda.
- DVDs are rapidly replacing videos in the Marshall Islands.
- Electricity is supplied at 110/120V, 60Hz AC. Plugs and sockets are US style with two flat blades. Adaptors are hard to find so bring one with you.
- The Marshalls use the imperial measurement system. See the Quick Reference page to convert to the metric system.

BOOKS

For a history of the islands in the words of local people, pick up a copy of the very readable *Life in the Republic of the Marshall Islands* edited by Linda Crowl et al.

On the Move in the Marshall Islands is a fantastic source of all sorts of information, including detailed nautical charts of each atoll. It's a labour of love put together by two long-term yachties and is only available on CD by mail order or from most tourist shops and hotels on the islands; you can order a copy from yachtseal@hotmail.com.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses and government offices are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.30pm. Government offices close from 12.30pm to 1.30pm.

CHILDREN

As elsewhere in the Pacific, children are welcome in the Marshalls. There are few child-specific activities though – no kids' section at the museum, playgrounds or holiday clubs – so come prepared with things to do.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

RMI Embassies & Consulates
Fiji (☎ 338 7899; 41 Borron Rd, Box 2038, Suva)
USA (☎ 202-234 5414; www.rmiembassyus.org; 2433 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in the RMI

Australia (☎ 625 7234) The Australian Navy Technical Mission Commander is the *de facto* Australian representative.

Britain (☎ 625 3828) The Honorary British Consul is Billy Roberts, CEO of the Marshalls Energy Company.

Japan (☎ 625 5437)

Taiwan (☎ 247 4141)

USA (☎ 247 4011)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

New Year's Eve Block Party Held on Majuro and open to all comers.

Coconut Cup Sailing Regatta In late March or early April, all types of sailing craft compete on a lagoon course, with associated festivities.

President's Cup Takes place on Constitution Day (1 May), and features inter-atoll canoe races, handicrafts and local food.

National Fisherman's Day Celebrated with competitive fishing during the first weekend of July.

All-Micronesia Fishing Tournament Takes place in early September.

Alele Week Culminates in a culture day in late September.

INTERNET ACCESS

There's good Internet access on Majuro (p272) and Kwaj, but none elsewhere.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bikini Atoll (www.bikiniatoll.com) Excellent information on the past and present effects of nuclear tests in the RMI.

Digital Micronesia (http://marshall.csu.edu.au) Hosted by Charles Sturt University in Australia, this electronic library and archive is a good guide to most written resources available on the Marshalls.

Embassy of the RMI (www.rmiembassyus.org) Operates out of the Washington embassy, and as the official Marshallese government site has many useful links.

Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (www.visitmarshallislands.com) The indispensable Marshall Islands visitor centre site.

MONEY

The Marshall Islands' currency is the US dollar (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). Credit cards are increasingly accepted on Majuro but have limited use elsewhere except on Ebeye, where you should expect a surcharge. Come with US dollars or travellers cheques if you can – banks are not happy changing other currencies, and if they do the rates are often poor. ATMs are available only on Majuro, and they're not always working.

Tipping is customary in the few 'top-end' restaurants but not elsewhere.

HOW MUCH?

- **Sunscreen:** US\$9
- **Insect repellent:** US\$3.60
- **Basic snorkel and mask:** US\$20
- **Postcard:** 50c to US\$1
- **One apple:** US\$1.70

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon of petrol:** US\$3.70
- **Gallon of drinking water:** US\$1.70
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** US\$1.75
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$15
- **Boiled pandanus roadside snack:** US\$3

TELEPHONE

The Marshall Islands' international telephone code is ☎ 692; there are no area codes. Calling Kwajalein Island from other RMI islands is like making an international call to the US. To make an international call, dial ☎ 011.

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA; ☎ 625 3363; ☎ 7am to midnight) is the place on Majuro to make international calls and send faxes. Phonecards are available at NTA exchanges and can be used for international calls, which cost US\$1.25 per minute during the day and US\$1 at night. Calls to outer islands use a radio telephone link.

A GSM mobile-phone system came into operation in the Marshalls in late 2005, and SIM cards are available in a variety of denominations.

TIME

The Marshalls are 12 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon oajuro, it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am the same day in Sydney and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN THE RMI

Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (MIVA; ☎ 625 6482; www.visitmarshallislands.com) is in the Small Island area of D-U-D on Majuro. You can download a recent version of its guidebook from the website.

VISAS

Visas are not generally required except for visitors from a few countries, including mainland China. On arrival, visitors are issued a 30-day entry permit that can be extended twice (for a maximum stay of 90 days) for US\$10 per extension by visiting the **Immigration Office** (☎ 625 8633; 4th fl Marshall Islands Development Bank Bldg, Delap) in Majuro.

TRANSPORT IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Continental Airlines (☎ 625 3209; www.continental.com) includes Kwajalein and Majuro as stopovers on the 'Circle Micronesia' island-hopper route between Honolulu and Guam. The return fare is around US\$1000.

Japan Airlines (www.jal.com) may start operating from Saipan to Majuro; check the website for current information.

The demise of **Air Nauru** (☎ 625 3409; www.airnauru.com.au) in late 2005 means that the route it used to fly (Australia to Majuro via the Solomons and Nauru and on to Kiribati and Fiji) is no longer available. The airline may be revived in the future.

See p837 for details of regional air passes that cover the Marshall Islands.

Sea

If you are coming to the Marshalls by yacht, check out www.micobeachyc.com before you leave home. Don't be put off by stories of how hard it is to get around the islands: there is always a right way and a wrong way to get things done.

On arrival, yachties must check in with Majuro's **Port Authority** (☎ 625 8269), which issues a US\$50 entrance fee, and obtain a permit from the **Ministry of Internal Affairs** (☎ 625 8240).

The only atolls with 'real' docks are Jaluit, Likiep, Bikini and Rongelap. Along with Arno, Mili, Ailinglaplap, Namu, Aur, Maloelap and Wotho, they all have safe passages for entry into the lagoon. Some charge entrance fees (up to US\$100); check with **Hilton Kendal** (☎ 625 8298) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Uliga. Order a copy of the CD *On the Move in the Marshall Islands* from yachtseal@hotmail.com – it has detailed nautical charts and information for yachties about each island.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies to most of the Marshalls' inhabited atolls once a week (see p280) and has a service between Majuro and Kwajalein every day except Thursday and Sunday (US\$310 return).

Bicycle

Flat coral atolls are great for bikes but if you want to cycle you'll have to bring your own, as there's no bike hire.

Boat

Only Arno is served by regular public boats (see p281). State-run supply ships travel irregularly to the outer atolls; the **Department**

DEPARTURE TAX

The Marshall Islands has a departure tax of US\$20 for adults and US\$15 for children under 18.

of Transportation Office (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock on Majuro can provide details (see p272). Private boats are more frequent.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

Short-term visitors can drive on a home-country licence for 30 days. After that you need to get a local licence, which costs US\$20 (US\$10 for the card, and US\$10 for mandatory lamination!).

HIRE

Formal car hire is only available on Majuro (p273), and costs about US\$50 per day.

Insurance seems to be an optional extra, at around US\$15 per day.

There is no formal motorcycle hire, though you might be able to work something out locally.

ROAD RULES

Driving in the Marshalls is a revelation for the Pacific, particularly on Majuro. It's orderly and drivers obey the speed limit and road rules, picking up and dropping off in nominated stopping areas.

Speed limits and distances are posted in miles; driving is on the right-hand side of the road.

Local Transport

There are no regular public buses on Majuro, but shared taxis are abundant and cheap in central D-U-D and there are some taxis on Ebeye. Organised public transport is rare in the outer islands.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

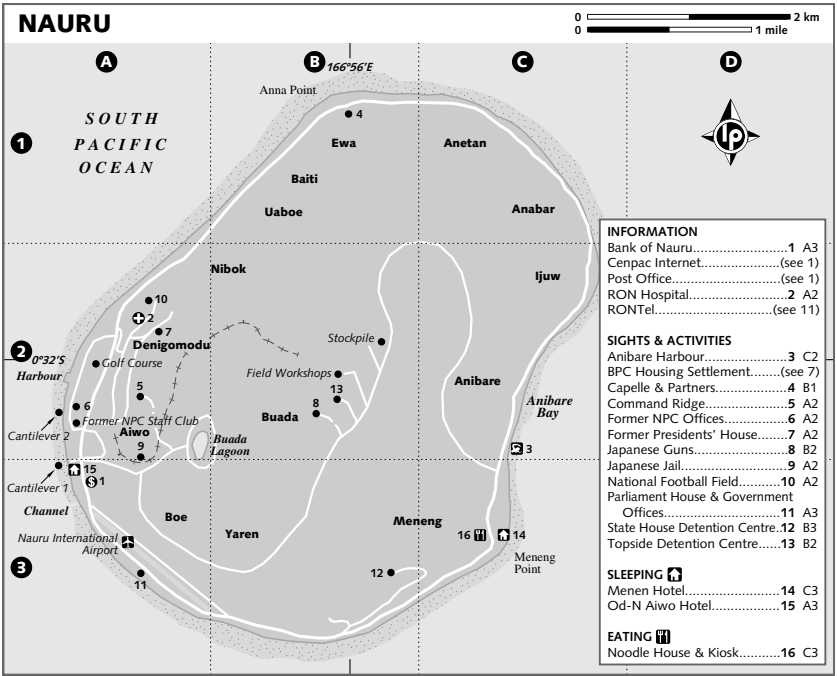
Nauru

The people of the tiny, potato-shaped Republic of Nauru were once among the world's richest. Formerly known as Pleasant Island (and now abbreviated, more prosaically, as RON), Nauru supplied Australia with abundant fertiliser for almost a century after vast phosphate deposits were discovered in 1900. By 2005, in an abrupt reversal of fortune, Nauru was a nearly failed state with an uncertain future, dependent on injections of cash from other countries to keep afloat.

Nauruans are doing it tough. Freight deliveries are rare, and employment is scarcer still. Health care is basic at best. It's a far cry from the heady phosphate-rich days of the 1970s and '80s, and many local people have become reticent in their dealings with visitors.

Nauru is not the easiest place to visit. Access is subject to the whims of transport, weather and the immigration department. With the closing of the phosphate mine, associated hospitality services such as hotels, restaurants and hire cars – where they exist at all – are minimal. Most visitors are politicians, diplomats or development workers – and during the days of Australia's 'Pacific Solution' to the arrival of refugees, extraordinary numbers of security guards and other contractors.

In spite of the present economic gloom, the island still offers glimpses of its former 'pleasantness', with wild surrounding ocean and sea birds swooping and dipping over the green inland cliffs. For WWII buffs there are remnants of the Japanese occupation scattered around the island, and the enormous skeletal remains of mining infrastructure are truly remarkable.



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Nauru is out of the cyclone zone and 42km south of the equator. It's always hot and humid, with an average temperature of 25°C, though luckily it's tempered by sea breezes along the coast. There's an average rainfall of 206cm despite periods of drought; most rain tends to fall between November and February.

HISTORY Outside Influences

Nauru was first sighted by Europeans in 1798, and the island quickly became a regular whaler port. In 1878, armed with European guns, Nauru's original 12 tribes began a 10-year civil war that reduced the island's population to 900 people. In 1886 Germany assumed control of Nauru, and German administrators and missionaries helped quash the civil war. Thirteen years later Nauru was folded into Germany's Marshall Islands Protectorate and Nauru remained under German control until WWI.

In 1900 Albert Ellis, a geologist with the London-based Pacific Islands Company

(later the British Phosphate Commission, BPC), discovered that his doorstep in London, a stone from Nauru, was actually high-grade phosphate. Mining operations commenced on the previously undeveloped Nauru in 1906.

The British controlled Nauru during WWI and auctioned off the Germans' shares of the BPC in London for £600,000. At war's end, Australia, New Zealand (NZ) and Great Britain assumed joint trusteeship

NAURU FACTS

- **Capital city:** None
- **Population:** 10,000
- **Land area:** 21 sq km
- **Number of islands:** One
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 674
- **Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$)
- **Languages:** English and Nauruan
- **Greeting:** *Mo yoran* (Hello)

of Nauru, eyeing its phosphate potential. To accommodate soaring postwar demand for phosphate, Nauru's first cantilever was built in the late 1920s.

The Germans shelled the phosphate works early in WWII and damaged the cantilever, causing phosphate operations to halt until after the war. In August 1942 the Japanese vanquished the island and the following year deported 1200 Nauruans to the island of Truk (now the state of Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia). The Japanese held on to Nauru until 1945; only 737 Nauruan deportees survived to return in 1946.

Independence

As it groped toward independence in the mid-20th century, Nauru entertained a series of local governing structures: a Council of Chiefs was formed in 1927, replaced in 1951 by the Nauru Local Government Council. Though neither had real power, the symbolism of self-government resonated with the people.

In 1947 Nauru became a UN Trust Territory, administered by the BPC triumvirate of Australia, NZ and Britain. Full independence came in 1968, shortly after the Nauru Phosphate Corporation (NPC) bought the rights to Nauru's phosphate industry from the BPC for A\$21 million.

After independence, exports (and revenue) continued to soar from new markets including Indonesia, South Korea and Japan, although the phosphate was the new nation's sole source of revenue. Landowners leased their land to the NPC in return for a share of the profits and Nauru's people became the richest in the world, with a GNP of US\$21,000 per capita, as annual phosphate exports reached two million tonnes.

Nauru has been a Special Member of the British Commonwealth since 1968, and was admitted to the UN in 1999. It has one of the world's smallest parliaments, elected every three years, which in turn elects a president from its 18 members. As turmoil continues over Nauru's uncertain future and economic failures, no-confidence votes that spur a change of government have become common; in 2003 the presidency turned over six times.

Glittering Past

In the 1970s and '80s Nauruans jetted around the world on the fleet of the nation's five aircraft, while at home water and electricity were free, stores supplied goods of all kinds, luxury cars cruised the island's 18km of sealed road and the government hotel was regarded as one of the best in the Pacific. Few Nauruans sought employment

with the NPC and the country relied on imported labour, mostly from Kiribati and Tuvalu. With most land utilised for mining, the subsistence economy disappeared and was replaced by an unsustainable reliance on imported goods and services.

Traumatic Present

By the early 1990s Nauru's exports fell to 500,000 tonnes, and in preparation for a post-phosphate world the government invested a hefty proportion of mining proceeds. These investments were, to put it mildly, a case study in financial mismanagement, aided by unscrupulous foreign advisors, and the Nauruan people's savings were squandered. Money evaporated in ill-timed real-estate investments around the world (including Honolulu, Fiji and Melbourne) and several million dollars were lost on a dud London musical. An attempt to create an offshore banking tax haven brought accusations of money-laundering in 1999 and a wide-ranging international ban was placed on financial transactions involving Nauru.

By the turn of the 21st century the remaining 30% or so of high-grade phosphate was in hard-to-access locations that required new machinery and mining techniques; mining slowed to a trickle and then stopped. The NPC stopped functioning, equipment was stripped, the country's infrastructure crumbled.

In 2005 the country was on its knees. The one remaining aircraft of the Air Nauru fleet was repossessed in December, the bank had no money, lack of fuel for the generators saw electricity limited to just a few hours a day, drinking water was contaminated and the health system was barely functioning. Many of the long-standing Chinese stores were closing, and restored diplomatic relations with Taiwan included an agreement by Taiwan to repatriate the long-term resident I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan workers who wanted to return home. Payments from Australia to fund its 'Pacific Solution' detention centres for asylum seekers (see the boxed text, p292) provided almost all cash income, and as part of the package (valued by 2005 at A\$58 million) Australians held key positions in the police and finance departments. Tourism, unsurprisingly, was nonexistent.

Uncertain Future

A young, reformist government elected in 2004 pledged change, including a salary ceiling of just A\$140 per fortnight for all Nauruan public servants up to the president; it was still in power in late 2005.

The best-case scenario for Nauru may be the reopening of the phosphate mine, but this would involve huge injections of cash (and presumably control) from overseas. Perhaps Australian and other overseas assistance will help Nauruans strengthen their society by upgrading the schools and hospital (where dedicated teachers and nurses continue to work in extremely difficult conditions) and by re-establishing long-forgotten sustainable agriculture and fisheries practices. The worst-case scenario may be depopulation, a plan that was first mooted in 1964.

THE CULTURE

Traditional Nauruan society was divided into 12 matrilineal tribes, but little else is known about the pre-European Nauruan culture, which was successfully erased, first by missionaries and later by the focus on phosphate. Most Nauruans are Christians, with fairly even numbers of Catholics and Protestants; evangelical churches are increasingly popular.

Ethnic Nauruans, with a mix of Polynesian and Micronesian ancestry, account for 70% of Nauru's population. The balance comprises other Pacific islanders, Asians (predominantly Chinese and Filipinos) and a few Europeans. I-Kiribati (Gilbertese) and Tuvaluans made up the majority of unskilled workers in the phosphate industry.

Few traditional cultural practices remain, though the *Nauru One Hundred Years Ago* series of booklets convey a good idea of how life used to be. Covering the use of pandanus, fishing, games, sports and oil processing, the booklets are translations of the notebooks of German missionary Alois Kayser, who lived on Nauru from 1904 to 1944. You may be able to find these books for sale at the Menen Hotel gift shop (p294) – in fact, they were the only things for sale at the gift shop when we visited.

Examples of Nauru *ekawada* (string figures) are occasionally on display. These are complex versions of the children's game of

PHOSPHATE FRENZY

The origin of Nauru's high-grade phosphate is generally accepted to be guano – bird poop – laid down over tens of thousands of years by tens of millions of seabirds. Periodic submergence of the island washed away impurities and left 85% pure phosphate lime. Phosphate is used in fertiliser, and looks undramatic – like light brown soil – lodging in cavities between coral pinnacles.

Mined initially by pick and shovel, the first shipment of 2000 tonnes left Nauru in 1907. By 1908 the vast industrial architecture required to support the growing mechanisation of the industry began to be installed: overhead cableways, a train line, conveyor belts, crushers and dryers. Between the world wars, the first of two huge cantilevers was built on the west coast, its swinging arms enabling phosphate to be loaded onto the ships more efficiently. After the hiatus of WWII the demand for phosphate rose dramatically; by the 1960s a second cantilever was in operation and Nauru accounted for 60% of all phosphate imported in to Australia.

For all the wealth brought by phosphate, mining has left Nauru physically a wreck. Trees have been removed, and much of the interior – called 'Topside' – consists of lifeless, grey-white coral pinnacles. With this in mind, Nauru filed a suit in the Hague-based International Court of Justice against Australia in 1989 for the damages caused by mining while the island was under Australian jurisdiction. In 1993 the suit was settled out of court for A\$109 million. Part of the agreement binds Australia to assist Nauru with rehabilitation and development of its landscape of crumbling infrastructure and skeletal machinery, reminders both of what the country once had, and what it has lost.

THE PACIFIC SOLUTION – NO SOLUTION

Nauru's period of economic distress coincided with Australia's hardened stance on immigration. Australia negotiated the so-called Pacific Solution, which involved paying Nauru millions to host a processing centre for boatloads of Australia-bound asylum seekers, fleeing the contemporary terrors of – mostly – Afghanistan and Iraq. Between 2001 and 2005, a total of 1232 traumatised men, women and children found themselves surrounded by Australians in uniform and dumped on a barely functioning nation.

We sometimes feel that we may not be given the priority as human being to live freely to be together with our love one and pass one minute in peace freedom, now we have become worse than sheep at least sheep can be use to its meat but we are for nothing.

For more than three years they were rarely allowed to leave Topside Camp – in arid, scorching pinnacle fields – and State House, on a dead-end road above the coastal strip.

I know whenever you receive letters from Nauru, they only contains hopelessness and sadness. Though our pain is double than what you can see in our letter but we express the rest to the air of Nauru, those times at mid night while we see no one around and sighs that what the world has come to for us. It is indeed impossible sometimes to go to outside, I just feel awkward and agitated to think of anything or doing anything in Nauru. As perpetually I only suffered and have been traumatized in Nauru, therefore now I even started to hate the gloomy aura of Nauru and it has become painful for me to think of anything that had happen to me in Nauru.

Culturally adrift, and largely ignored or resented by the local population, with remoteness and the increasing difficulty of communication

adding to their stress, the detainees waited while their cases were heard and accepted, rejected, appealed, delayed or all of these. Some self-harmed, or went on hunger strikes; all became severely depressed.

This world is really so strange, I didn't ever think about hunger strike and didn't know that what it means but I have been in hunger strike the thing that I didn't know about, I forgot all tragedy that I suffer in Afghanistan, all the risk that I felt in dreadful voyage from Indonesia to Australia, but tears on Nauru will be unforgettable.

In October 2005, 25 of the remaining 27 men were told they would be leaving Nauru. In an ironic twist, after more than four years and countless immigration interviews, most were granted refugee status – temporarily at least – in Australia, the country that had tried so hard and for so long to refuse them admission.

Right now I'm living in the peaceful environment with growing new confidence, experiencing lovely winter season making new relationship with lovely and generous people in Australia...this is the lovely morning cool and chilly for me because years I have been living in the same in which all seasons were hot neither winter or spring which was really boring...actually life is very beautiful with all different colorful seasons and I'm experiencing the new chapter of my life through new winter after such a long time hardship situation.

Arif Ruhani was a boy of 17 when he left Afghanistan in 1999, which was the last time that he saw his family. He was in immigration detention on Nauru between 2001 and 2005 and is now living and working in Sydney, under the mixed blessings of a temporary protection visa. Virginia would like to thank Abbas, Ali Jan, Arif H, Ashraf and Sagar, who gave her a surreal guided tour of the island from the viewpoint of detainees. In late 2005, all were granted temporary protection in Australia.

an account, with illustrations, of this rarely seen cultural practice.

Sport – particularly weightlifting and Australian Rules football – is a national obsession.

NODDY HUNTING

Grilled noddy is a Nauruan delicacy, and hunting black noddy birds still happens on the slopes above the coastal ridge. Hunters don camouflage clothing and head out after dark. In earlier centuries they would make noddy-like whistles to attract the birds; these days they bring stereos with pre-recorded noddy songs. The hunters then snag the noddies with a net attached to a long bamboo stick; the birds are plucked, gutted and cooked whole, served with their heads tucked under and claws still attached, laid out on a platter like sardines in a tin.

LANGUAGE

Although English is used for official government transactions, Nauruan – a language with both Polynesian and Micronesian influences – dominates conversation. You will hear a smattering of other Pacific languages as well.

Nauruan basics

Hello.	<i>Mo yoran.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tarowang.</i>
How are you?	<i>Wo reit ed?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Mmo kor.</i>
Please.	<i>Magada.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Tubw.</i>
Yes.	<i>Em.</i>
No.	<i>Keo.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

With a land area of just 21.3 sq km, Nauru is a stunning sight from the air – an isolated blot of land with an interior of grey-white coral pinnacles.

The coastal strip is comparatively lush and green, with coconut palms, pandanus and salt bush fringing the ocean, and banyan fig trees and wild papaya on the slopes behind. Frigate and tropicbirds soar overhead, noddies and exquisite fairy terns chatter in the treeline, and wading birds glean on the tidal flats. In freshwater Buada Lagoon, tucked in the centre of the island, stone walls mark out local milkfish farms.

The mining industry has wreaked havoc on Nauru's rainfall. The interior rock exposed by deforestation reflects the sun's

rays upwards and chases away the clouds and rain, so periods of drought are increasingly common. Deforestation combined with this 'oven effect' is driving away many native birds, including the frigate birds and Nauru's beloved noddies (see the boxed text, left).

ORIENTATION

An 18km sealed road circles the island, and a road into the interior branches off near the NPC office buildings and loops around to the coast near the Menen Hotel. Across the runway from the airport are the government offices, requiring a circle around the runway to get there. The road is closed for a few minutes when arriving aircraft taxi from the runway to the parking apron.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

WWII relics are scattered across Nauru. Most impressive of these are the **gun emplacements** that now overlook the Topside detention centre, and the **Japanese jail** built into and around phosphate pinnacles near Buada Lagoon. **Command Ridge** is Nauru's highest point, with rusted guns and bunkers remaining. These are all tricky to find; ask for directions, and tell someone where you're going if you want to poke around on your own.

Drive into the interior to see the industrial archaeology of the phosphate mining operations and the resulting moonscape of coral pinnacles. Back on the coast, the two giant **cantilevers** built offshore to expedite ship loading are an impressive sight. Wander around the old **BPC housing settlement** above the hospital, and check out the view from the ruins of the once-splendid **former Presidents' House**, burned down in 2001 by a local mob who were furious at the government's mismanagement of funds. On the coastal strip behind the cantilevers are rows of decaying **barracks** that used to house the phosphate workers, many now sheltering colourful I-Kiribati outrigger fishing canoes.

The water around Nauru is generally treacherous for swimming, although you can swim and snorkel in the harbour off the boat ramp at **Anibare**; if it's calm, there are fish to see along the back of the harbour wall. You can walk out onto the reef flats behind the Menen Hotel at low tide. Sport-fishing charters can be organised through

cat's cradle, where string stretched across the hands is configured into formal patterns to tell traditional stories, often based around the 12 original tribes. *The String Figures of Nauru*, by Honor Maude *et al*, is

WARNING

We visited in late 2005. Given Nauru's precarious economic situation, expect facilities and prices to change – for better or for worse – more quickly than normal. If you can, check details before you go.

Capelle & Partners (☎ 444 3280; cppurchasing@cenpac.net.nr) when the boat and skipper are available.

The **golf course**, spanning the main road, is barely recognisable as such but if you can find a set of clubs it is playable. While there's still an expat community on Nauru, there's a weekly Hash House Harriers running/drinking meet; ask locally. Confrontational local teams play Australian Rules football most weekends on the packed-dirt football field beside the hospital.

SLEEPING & EATING

Od-N Aiuo Hotel (☎ 444 3701; s/d A\$65/75; ☹) It's a concrete block, but it's right in town, looks out over the water and has 30 clean but plain rooms with fridge and TV. Check out the traditional Nauru string figures on display at reception.

Menen Hotel (☎ 444 3300; fax 444 3595; s A\$85; ☹) This government-owned place, on the coast 4km east of the airport, has seen much better times and needs a major overhaul; expect the minimum in service and facilities and you won't be disappointed.

Capelle & Partners (☎ 444 3280; cppurchasing@cenpac.net.nr; r A\$90; ☹) Sophie Oppenheimer – a member of the original Capelle family who started the shop in 1965 – manages Capelle's shop, above which are three rooms for rent. They're absolutely the best option on the island if they're available. Capelle's is the main island store, selling everything from hardware to clothing and computer accessories, and a wide selection of dry goods, drink and (hallelujah) fresh fruit and vegetables. Prices aren't as unreasonable as they might seem, given that fresh goods are air-freighted in.

A few Chinese stores, selling very basic goods, are dotted around the island and Chinese restaurants of varying quality abound; ask which one is currently recommended when you arrive. There's a small kiosk and noodle house opposite the Menen Hotel.

NAURU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Nauru has two hotels, but do not expect luxury. Tax is included in the room rates given in this chapter.

BOOKS

The Phosphateers by Maslyn Williams and Barry MacDonald is a detailed history of the BPC in its heyday of mining on the three great phosphate islands of Nauru and Banaba (Ocean Island) in the Pacific, and Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean.

Read Michael Gordon's *Freeing Ali – the Human Face of the Pacific Solution* (2005) for an insight into the detention of asylum seekers on Nauru.

BUSINESS HOURS

Opening hours are whimsical, but most ofices will be open for some hours between 10am and 4pm. Expect a long lunch hour. Kiosks and restaurants operate any time between 7am and 10pm.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**Nauruan Embassies & Consulates**

Australia (☎ 03-9653 5709; fax 9654 4738; 50th fl, 80 Collins St, Melbourne)

Fiji (☎ 331 3566; fax 330 2861; 7th fl Ratu Sukuna House, MacArthur St, Suva)

USA (☎ 212-937 0074; 800 Second Ave, Suite 400 D, New York 10017)

PRACTICALITIES

- There are no local newspapers or magazines in Nauru.
- Nauru has three TV stations: CNN, a local station that intersperses sport and movies with live proceedings from Nauru's parliament, and Australia's ABC Asia-Pacific channel.
- There are no videos or DVDs available for hire.
- Nauru runs on 240V, 50Hz AC electricity and plugs are Australian style with three flat prongs.
- Nauru uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet is available at Cenpac in the Bank of Nauru building and, sometimes, at RON-Tel in the government offices complex.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Read the briefing paper 'Nauru: between a mined-out rock and a hard place' (www.uniya.org/research/view_nauru.htm) for background information on the relationship between Nauru and Australia.

MONEY

Nauru's official currency is the Australian dollar (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). The cash-strapped Bank of Nauru is not functioning, and it is not possible to exchange or access money on Nauru. Bring (preferably more than) the amount of Australian dollars you think you'll need.

There are no credit-card facilities and no ATMs.

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** A\$2
- **1.5L bottled water:** A\$3.30
- **Can of VB beer:** A\$3.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** Souvenirs aren't available on Nauru
- **Head of celery:** A\$12

TELEPHONE

The international telephone code is ☎ 674 and there are no telephone area codes. Faxes can be sent and received at RONTel and, when the line is working, expensive international calls can be made there.

It's only possible to make overseas calls from public phones using an Australian Telstra Phoneaway card. If you're caught unprepared, ask Australian friends to buy a card, scratch the back of it, and email you the PIN number and Nauru access code.

There is no mobile phone service.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

DEPARTURE TAX

Nauru has a departure tax of A\$50.

TIME

Nauru is 12 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon in Nauru, it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am in Sydney, and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

VISAS

It's a frustrating and lengthy process to obtain a visitor visa for Nauru. Visas *must* be approved before arrival and you must bring a letter of confirmation with you. Visas are free for official visitors; others pay A\$100 on arrival, at which point you give your passport to the immigration authorities and pick it up, with visa stamped, from the **immigration office** (☎ 444 3133; fax 444 3832) in the government buildings the next working day. Ask for Ernest Stephen, the helpful chief immigration officer, if you have problems on arrival.

TRANSPORT IN NAURU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Following the repossession of the airline's plane in late 2005, **Air Nauru** (www.airnauru.com.au) has been contracting an aircraft to run a weekly service between Brisbane (Australia), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Nauru and Tarawa (Kiribati). This is an interim measure only; check the Internet for updates.

Yacht facilities are nonexistent.

GETTING AROUND

The hotels may send a vehicle to meet you at the airport, or they may not. Be prepared to hitch or walk.

There is no public transport or formal car rental on the island. During fuel shortages it is difficult to hire a car; ask around locally, and expect to pay around A\$80 per day plus fuel. Many locals ride scooters. The coast road is a hot but flat bicycle ride, if you can borrow a bike. Driving is on the left.

New Caledonia

There's no better place to experience the Pacific with a taste of France than New Caledonia, where Melanesian tradition blends with French sophistication. This mix of the chic yet casual, *très* French but ultimately Pacific comes together with peerless élan in Noumea, the cosmopolitan capital. Dining out and shopping run the gamut from gourmet restaurants to humble *roulottes*, from Chinatown's colourful shops to the expensively elegant, air-conditioned boutiques on rue de Sébastopol.

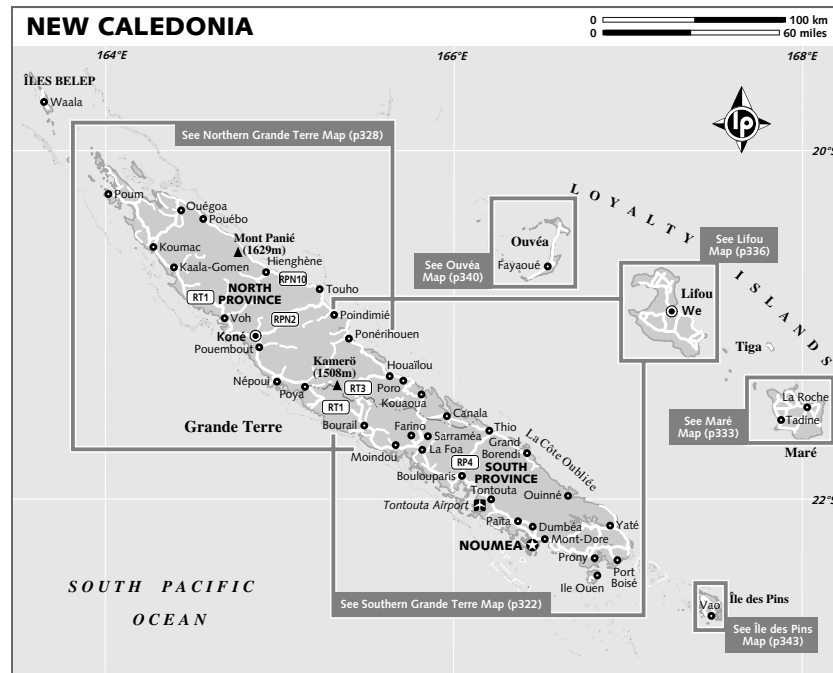
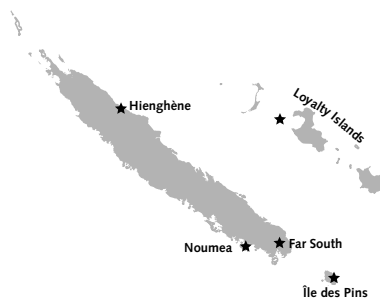
When you leave the capital, the urban scenery gives way to a wealth of changing landscapes – the rolling plains of *la brousse* (the bush), lush river valleys, steep mountains coursed by tumbling waterfalls, cool rainforests and wild coastlines.

Southeast of Grande Terre, the main island, lies romantic Île des Pins with its slender pines, white-sand beaches and emerald lagoon. To the east, life proceeds at a leisurely pace in the relaxed Loyalty Islands, steeped in Kanak culture.

New Caledonia is surrounded by the world's largest enclosed lagoon, where marine treasures of all shapes and sizes lie waiting to be discovered – canyons and caves, exquisite coral, the smallest of tropical fish, turtles, sea snakes and sharks. Dolphin and whale spotting are other delights in store, or simply the luxury of total relaxation on the soft, warm sand of a deserted isle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience traditional Kanak life in **Hienghène** (p330), staying in homestays and discovering the region's waterfalls, rock formations and old river ferry
- Kayak through a drowned forest, abseil down waterfalls and hike in the solitary landscape of the **Far South** (p321)
- Visit the magnificent **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315) in Noumea and treat yourself to fine wine and French cuisine in the capital's gourmet **restaurants** (p318)
- Glide across tranquil Baie d'Upi on **Île des Pins** (p344) in a traditional sailing *pirogue*
- Feast on grilled lobster at a friendly Kanak homestay on the **Loyalty Islands** (p332) before retiring to your *case* for the night



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

New Caledonia has a temperate climate with two main seasons: cold (June to August) and hot (mid-November to mid-April). Water temperatures drop to 21°C in the cold season, and average air temperatures are around 24°C during the day and 15°C at night. Travellers wanting to laze around on the beach should avoid these months, but

for hikers this is an ideal time to visit New Caledonia. In the hot season average maximum temperatures vary between 26°C and 30°C. The cyclone season occurs during the hottest months, January to March.

Overall, the best time to visit New Caledonia is from September to December, when the days are not too hot and sticky, and there's less likelihood of rain.

For Noumea's climate chart, see p827.

NEW CALEDONIA FACTS

- Capital city (and island):** Noumea (Grande Terre)
- Population:** 230,000
- Land area:** 18,575 sq km
- International telephone code:** 687
- Currency:** Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)
- Languages:** French and Kanak
- Greeting:** *Bonjour* (Hello)
- Website:** www.newcaledoniaturism-south.com

HISTORY

New Caledonia was first populated by a hunter-gatherer people known as the Lapita (see the boxed text, p39), who arrived from the islands of Vanuatu around 1500 BC. The Lapita were the ancestors of the Melanesians and Polynesians.

From about the 11th century AD until the 18th century, groups of Polynesians also migrated to New Caledonia.

Early Europeans

The English explorer James Cook spotted Grande Terre in 1774, naming it New Caledonia because the terrain reminded him of

the highlands of Scotland (which was called Caledonia by the Romans).

During the 19th century British and US whalers, followed by sandalwood traders, were the first commercial Westerners to land on the islands.

The first missionaries, two Protestant Samoans from the London Missionary Society, arrived on Île des Pins in 1841. A little later, French Catholic missionaries established a mission at Balade on the northeast coast of Grande Terre in 1843.

French Colonisation

France officially claimed New Caledonia in 1853, initially establishing it as a penal colony. The first shiploads of convicts arrived at Port-de-France (present-day Noumea) in 1864. In 1871 they were joined by political prisoners from the Paris Commune uprising and the Arab revolt of 1870 against the French colonial government in Algeria.

Having served their sentences, many former convicts were given concessions to farm, and as more settlers arrived an increasing amount of Melanesian land was taken over. This resulted in the revolt of 1878, led by chief Ataï, which lasted several months and was eventually quashed by the French, aided by allied clans.

WWI & WWII

During WWI male Caldoches (New Caledonia's European inhabitants) and Kanaks (the indigenous Melanesians) were recruited to fight on the French and Turkish fronts.

During WWII New Caledonian soldiers fought for the allied forces in North Africa, Italy and France. Meanwhile, 40,000 US and a smaller number of New Zealand (NZ) soldiers set up a base in New Caledonia. The influence of the US soldiers in particular ushered New Caledonia into the modern era.

Postwar

Between 1946 and 1956 Kanaks were progressively given the right to vote, and in 1953 the first political party involving Kanaks was formed.

A nickel boom in the 1960s and '70s saw many New Caledonians abandoning their professions to work in the nickel industry. The boom brought a large number of

French migrants to the territory, creating significant social upheaval. The migrants were seen as opportunists by the locals and after the boom ended a lot of people were left unemployed.

Independence became an increasingly important issue for Kanaks, and the majority of Kanak parties joined to form the Front Indépendantiste (Independence Front) in 1979. In 1977 Jacques Lafleur established the loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), the main adversary of the pro-independence movement.

The Independence Movement

In 1984 other pro-independence parties joined the Front Indépendantiste to form the Front de Libération National Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), with Jean-Marie Tjibaou as its leader.

In that same year, mounting political tensions resulted in Les Événements (the Troubles), a period of violent confrontation between pro-independence Kanaks and loyalist supporters.

In 1986 the UN General Assembly voted in favour of adding New Caledonia to its decolonisation list.

Conflict & Resolution

In January 1987 the French National Assembly approved a new plan for the territory and an election was called for 24 April 1988, the same day as the first round of voting for the French presidency. Pro-independence supporters demanded that the date be changed, and ended up boycotting the election. The disagreement led to the Ouvéa hostage drama (see p339).

The presidential elections saw the Socialists returned to power and a concerted effort was made to end the bloodshed in New Caledonia. Newly elected Prime Minister Michel Rocard brokered the Matignon Accords, a historic peace agreement signed by the two New Caledonian leaders, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur.

Under the accords it was agreed that New Caledonia would be divided into three regions: the Southern, Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces. It was assumed that the latter two would come under Kanak control in an election. The accords also stated that a referendum on self-determination would

be held in 1998, with all New Caledonians eligible to vote.

In May 1989 Jean-Marie Tjibaou and his second-in-command, Yeiwene Yeiwene, were assassinated (see p339). The assassinations ended the political violence in New Caledonia.

A Common Destiny

Following the Matignon Accords, a new agreement between the FLNKS, RPCR and French government was signed in Noumea in 1998. The Noumea Accord outlines a 15- to 20-year period of growth and development, planning for the gradual transfer of administrative powers from the government of France to the government of New Caledonia and culminating in a referendum on independence. It also calls for the establishment of a common destiny for New Caledonians through the selection of symbols of national identity such as an anthem and flag.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

New Caledonia has a unique Franco-Pacific cultural blend. It's a mix of Western efficiency and Pacific casualness.

A good proportion of Noumea's inhabitants have an unmistakable Frenchness about them, such as the topless women without an ounce of fat on their tanned bodies who adorn Anse Vata and Baie des Citrons beaches. Noumea is also where many French, Caldoches and people of Asian origin have made their fortunes in business and they love displaying that wealth. People cruise around town in their big shiny cars and the city suburbs are full of large flash houses. Noumeans are also very sporty, and in the evenings you'll see them cycling, jogging and walking along the city's picturesque southern bays.

Outside the capital you will generally meet two types: discrete Kanaks and sociable Broussards (rural Caldoches). Your first impression of Kanaks will probably be of reserved, polite and somewhat distant people and it may take a while to break the ice. Broussards on the other hand are great storytellers and you will find it hard to fit a word in edgewise. The one thing all rural New Caledonians have in common is their generosity and warm hospitality.

Lifestyle

The lifestyles enjoyed by Kanaks and Caldoches are similar in many ways, as both groups are family oriented and enjoy being outdoors in their leisure time. What sets them apart are cultural differences such as *la coutume*, the essential component of Kanak society.

La coutume is a code for living that encompasses rites, rituals and social interaction between and within clans. During important events such as birth, marriage and mourning, symbolic offerings are made and discussions are held.

Population

The last census, carried out in 2004, tallied New Caledonia's population at around 230,000, two-thirds of whom live in the greater Noumea region. Kanaks are the largest group, making up 45% of the population, followed by Europeans (35%), Polynesians, Asians and other minority groups.

All New Caledonians are French citizens, but as in any multicultural society these citizens are divided into various groups.

Kanaks, the indigenous Melanesians, are courteous and rather shy. The majority live in rural clan communities known as *tri-*

KANAK GRANDE CASE

The *grande case* (big hut) is one of the strongest symbols of the Kanak community. It is the widest and tallest *case* in each clan settlement and is traditionally home to the chief. Nowadays the chiefs all have modern homes located close to the *grande case* where tribal gatherings and discussions still take place.

Where possible, the hut is built on a knoll above the rest of the village. The central pillar, an immense tree trunk, is erected first. It will support the entire *case* and symbolises the chief. A stone hearth is laid between the central pillar and the door.

The entrance to the *grande case* is via a low doorway flanked by carved posts. Inside, the walls and ceiling are lined with wooden posts or beams, lashed to the frame with strong vines, all of which lean against the central pillar to symbolise the clan's close link to the chief. Finally, the roof is topped with a *flèche faïtière*, a carved wooden spear that becomes home to ancestral spirits.

bus. Many Kanaks from northern Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands have moved to Noumea to pursue their secondary and tertiary education and to find employment. However, they still maintain strong ties with their *tribus*, and return there for holidays and cultural and family celebrations.

New Caledonia's European population has two distinct groups: the Caldoches and the Métros. Caldoches are those who were born in New Caledonia and have ancestral ties that go back to the days of the penal colony or to the early French settlers. They are also subdivided into two groups: urban Caldoches, who often prefer to be referred to by the term Caledonian; and rural Caldoches, known as Broussards (people from the bush). Many Broussards are cattle breeders who have forged a culture of their own, similar to that of Outback Australia. Depending on the context, Caledonian refers to all New Caledonians or second-generation inhabitants.

The term *Métro* comes from *Métropolitain*, as in metropolitan France, and refers to those who were not born in New Caledonia but who have migrated temporarily or permanently from France. *Zoreille* is a more colloquial term used to describe these people and, depending on the context, can be derogatory.

There is a large Polynesian population in New Caledonia, mainly from the French territory of Wallis and Futuna. In fact, more Wallisians live in New Caledonia than in their homeland and they make up 12% of the population.

People of Asian origin, including Indonesians, Vietnamese and Chinese, began arriving in New Caledonia in the early 20th century. Today they are mainly involved in the trade sector.

SPORT

Pétanque, a game inherited from the French and sometimes called *boules* (bowls), is played mainly by men on a *boulodrome*, a smooth, hard pitch. Soccer, volleyball and a local version of cricket are also popular.

ARTS

Wood sculpture is a popular form of artistic expression in New Caledonia, particularly in Kanak culture. Île des Pins is famous for its sculpted wooden posts. A few workshops

PLACE NAMES

You'll come across many different spellings for Kanak place names. We have used the most commonly used spellings in this chapter.

on Lifou are open to the public. Soapstone sculpture is popular on the northeast coast of Grande Terre around Pouébo.

Painting is another popular art, and several art galleries in Noumea sell paintings by local artists.

For an overview of Kanak arts, visit the Tjibaou Cultural Centre (p315).

Dance

Many dance styles are currently popular in New Caledonia, including *pilou* (traditional Kanak dance), Tahitian, Vietnamese and Indonesian. Performances are held regularly at festivals and public events such as the *Jeudis du Centre Ville* (see p314) in Noumea.

Literature

New Caledonia has a dynamic literary scene made up of several publishers and many authors.

Déwé Gorodey is a Kanak politician and writer who evokes the struggle for independence in her writing and gives a feminist view of Kanak culture. *The Kanak Apple Season* is a collection of short stories, exploring Kanak political and cultural issues.

Pierre Gope is another Kanak writer whose works include poetry and plays. Caledonian Nicolas Kurtovitch writes poetry, short stories and plays. *Les Dieux sont borgnes* is a play co-written by Gope and Kurtovitch. The first half is set in the 18th century at the arrival of the first European, Captain James Cook. The second half is set in contemporary New Caledonia. Bernard Berger, also Caledonian, is a cartoonist whose *Brousse en Folie* comic-book series is immensely popular.

Louis-José Barbançon, a Caledonian historian, has written books on the penal-colony history and the difficult political climate of the 1980s. *L'Archipel des Forçats* looks at the convict history of New Caledonia.

(Continued on page 309)

(Continued from page 300)

Music

In addition to popular Western music and hip-hop, reggae has a huge following in New Caledonia, along with music from Tahiti, Vanuatu and Fiji. The immensely popular local music known as Kaneka is a mixture of reggae and traditional Kanak rhythms.

Dick and Natr Buama, formerly of the band Gurejele, have both produced solo albums in recent years. Edou, leader of the band Mexem from Lifou, continues to produce albums, both solo and with his band. Gulaan, former lead singer of OK! Ryos, sings beautiful melodies in his clear, mellow voice. Tim Semeke and his cultural dance troupe We Ce Ca have produced several albums.

LANGUAGE

There are more than 30 Kanak languages. French is the official language.

New Caledonian basics

Hello/Good morning.	Bonjour.
Good evening.	Bonsoir.
Goodbye.	Au revoir or Tata (Kanak farewell)
Yes.	Oui.
No.	Non.
Thank you (very much).	Merci (beaucoup).
Please.	S'il vous plaît.
Excuse me.	Excusez-moi.
I'm sorry.	Pardon.
How are you?	Comment allez-vous?
I'm fine (thanks).	Je vais bien (merci).
I don't understand.	Je ne comprends pas.

ENVIRONMENT

Despite its small size, New Caledonia has a rich endemic biodiversity. The main threats to its natural environment are mining, deforestation, cattle farming and wildfires.

Geography

The territory is made up of an archipelago comprising the main island, Grande Terre (16,500 sq km); Île des Pins (152 sq km); the Loyalty Islands (1980 sq km); and the tiny Îles Belep. Scattered around at considerable distances are various minuscule and uninhabited dependencies.

Grande Terre is 400km long and 50km wide. Central mountain ranges divide the

BEST EATING

New Caledonia's excellent restaurants offer a choice of gourmet, traditional or international cuisine. The following are Lonely Planet's top six dining options:

- Combine a picnic lunch with a spot of people-watching in Noumea's Place des Cocotiers (p314). There are many *snacks* (small eateries) and lunch bars in the vicinity of Place des Cocotiers.
- Walk down to Le Roof (p320) at the end of the pier at Anse Vata for a gastronomic experience.
- Be entertained by Tahitian dancers over a sumptuous seafood buffet at Anse Vata's Nouvata Park Hôtel (p317).
- Tuck into one of Île des Pins's famous *bougnas* at Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis (p346).
- Admire the ocean view as you savour a seafood meal at the friendly Gîte Seday (p334) on Maré.
- Join other guests around the table for a convivial three-course meal at Relais de Poingam (p329).

lush, mountainous east coast from the dry west coast and its savanna plains. Grande Terre is rich in minerals and has one of the biggest nickel reserves in the world. The opencast mining technique used to extract nickel has caused a significant amount of erosion, which has affected many mountains and rivers, as well as the lagoon. However, legislation to minimise negative environmental impacts introduced in the 1970s has resulted in mining companies assuming more environmental responsibility.

The Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins are uplifted, flat coral islands (see p63). New Caledonia has 1600km of reef enclosing a magnificent 23,500 sq km turquoise lagoon, the largest enclosed lagoon in the world.

Ecology

New Caledonia's flora and fauna originated in eastern Gondwanaland, evolving in isolation when Grande Terre became separated 80 million years ago. As a result there are many unique plants and animals, especially birds, and per square kilometre New Caledonia boasts the world's richest diversity.

THE CAGOU

The flightless *cagou* (*Rhynochetos jubatus*) is a much-loved New Caledonian bird, and like the kiwi in New Zealand it is an unofficial national symbol. The *cagou* is about 50cm tall and has a soft grey plumage and crest, red eyes and an orange beak. It has an unusual call that sounds like a dog yapping. Ironically, dogs are its main predator as the *cagou* cannot fly.

Of the 3250 flowering plant species, 80% are native.

With an estimated 68 species of land birds, about 20 of which are indigenous, New Caledonia is of interest to ornithologists and amateur bird lovers alike. The most renowned indigenous species is the endangered *cagou* (*Rhynochetos jubatus*), New Caledonia's unofficial national bird (see the boxed text, above). Of the few land mammals, only *roussettes* (members of the fruit-bat family), a traditional Kanak food source, are indigenous. Introduced mammals include rusa deer, one of the largest of its species. The deer have reproduced to such an extent that they are creating major damage to native plants and the environment in general. The venison is served in local restaurants. You can see the deer on Caldoche farms on the west coast.

New Caledonia's waters are home to around 2000 species of fish. Humpback whales visit between July and September. New Caledonia's 14 species of sea snakes are often sighted on the water's surface or on land. The most commonly seen is the amphibious *tricot rayé* or banded sea krait. They are highly venomous but not aggressive and bites are extremely rare.

Parks & Reserves

There are many land and marine parks and reserves in New Caledonia. In the Far South, Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (p321) and Chutes de la Madeleine (p322) are easily accessible. The ascent of Mont Panié (p331), at 1629m New Caledonia's highest peak, is suitable for fit hikers.

The French government is in the process of applying to have New Caledonian's lagoon added to the list of Unesco World Heritage sites.

NOUMEA

pop 92,000

With its cheerful multi-ethnic community, New Caledonia's cosmopolitan capital is both sophisticated and uncomplicated, classy and casual. The relaxed city sits on a large peninsula, surrounded by picturesque bays, and offers visitors a variety of experiences. Diners have the choice of eating out at classy French restaurants or humble establishments in Chinatown, while shopaholics can blow their savings on the latest Paris fashions or go bargain hunting for imported Asian textiles.

ORIENTATION

Central Noumea revolves around Place des Cocotiers, a large, shady square with landscaped gardens, a couple of blocks in from the waterfront. The main leisure area where locals and tourists hang out lies south of the city centre at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata, with beaches, restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The domestic airport at Magenta is 4km to the east of the city centre.

NOUMEA IN...

One Day

Head out to the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315), then into town for a picnic at **Place des Cocotiers** (p314) or a three-course lunch at **Zanzibar** (p320). While away the afternoon at the **beach** in Anse Vata or Baie des Citrons (p315). In the evening have a drink at **Bodega Del Mar** (p320), then amble down the pier to **Le Roof** (p320) for a gourmet meal.

Two Days

Follow the itinerary above and on the second day do the **Noumea walking tour** (p313), starting with breakfast at the **market** (p315). Visit the **aquarium** (p315) before catching a taxi boat to **Île aux Canards** (p315) for some fabulous snorkelling. Back on terra firma, head to the **Baie des Citrons shopping complex** (p319) for dinner, then check out the nightlife at one of Anse Vata's **nightclubs** (p320).

Maps

Bookshops sell IGN maps with scales ranging from 1:50,000 to 1:500,000. These have the most geographical detail but they are about 15 years old. The Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud (see right) has very good free maps of Noumea and New Caledonia.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librairie Calédo Livres (Map p318; ☎ 27 38 11; 21 rue Jean Jaurès) Specialises in books on New Caledonia and the Pacific.

Librairie Montaigne (Map p318; ☎ 27 34 88; 23 rue de Sébastopol) Has a selection of books and travel guides in English.

Internet Access

Cyber BD Citron (Map p312; ☎ 24 11 69; cyberbdcitrons@hotmail.com; 35 promenade Roger Laroque) In the Baie des Citrons complex.

Cyber Noumea Centre (Map p318; ☎ 26 26 98; tetnet@mls.nc; Galerie Noumea Centre)

Medical Services

Pharmacies, identified by a green cross, are dotted all over Noumea. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays only one emergency pharmacy is open, according to a rotating schedule.

Hôpital Gaston Bourret (Map p318; ☎ 25 66 66, emergencies 25 67 67; 7 rue Paul Doumer) Noumea's main hospital.

Money

ATMs are outside most banks, and they accept most major credit cards. There are several banks on av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur.

Banque Calédonienne d'Investissement (BCI; Map p318; ☎ 24 20 60; cnr rue du Général Mangin & rue Anatole France)

BNP Paribas (Map p312; ☎ 26 21 03; 111 promenade Roger Laroque) At the Anse Vata shops.

Société Générale Bank (Map p318; ☎ 25 63 00; 44 rue de l'Alma & 56 av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur) Western Union representative.

Post

Main post office (Map p318; ☎ 26 84 00; 7 rue Eugène Porcheron) The main office of the Office des Postes et Télécommunications (OPT) has a poste restante and fax service, and there's an ATM outside the building. There's also a post office in Anse Vata.

Tourist Information

The main visitor information centres for the North Province, Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins are based in Noumea, along with those for Noumea and the South Province.

Destination Île des Pins (Map p318; ☎ 24 92 80; info@canl.nc; 12 bis rue du Général Mangin; ☎ 8am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) In the small mall next to the Mobil station, the office arranges bookings for Île des Pins.

Destination Îles Loyauté (www.iles-loyaute.com) Central Noumea (Map p318; ☎ 27 66 27; fax 27 48 27; Immeuble Central 1, 2nd fl, 27 rue de Sébastopol; ☎ 8-11.30am & 12.30-5pm Mon-Fri; Anse Vata (Map p312; ☎ 28 93 60; 117 promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Sat)

Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud (Map p318; ☎ 28 75 80, free call 05 75 80; office-tourisme@canl.nc; Place des Cocotiers; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The main Noumea and Southern Province visitor information centre has masses of practical information including excellent (free) maps of Noumea and New Caledonia in English, information on the Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces and a monthly entertainment guide, *NC Pocket*, listing festivals, exhibitions, concerts and Jeudi du Centre Ville themes.

Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud Point i (Map p312; ☎ 28 75 80; promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 9am-5.30pm daily) Small information centre in the *faré* on the beach at Anse Vata.

Tourisme Province Nord (Map p318; ☎ 27 78 05; www.tourismeprovincenord.nc; 35 av du Maréchal Foch, Le Village shopping centre; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) The Northern Province visitor information office has informative free maps and brochures on the North Province.

Travel Agencies

The following companies can organise transport, tours and accommodation within New Caledonia.

Air Calédonie (Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; 39 rue de Verdun)

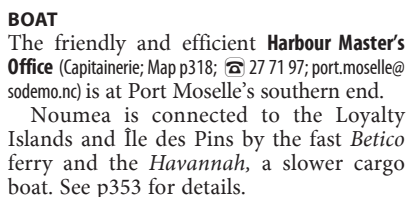
Alpha International (Map p312; ☎ 27 24 20; www.alpha-tourisme.com; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata)

Arc en Ciel Voyages (Map p318; ☎ 27 19 80; www.arcenciel-voyages.nc; 59 av du Maréchal Foch)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR
Tontouta International Airport is 45km northwest of Noumea. See p351 for details of international flights.



The hop-on, hop-off **Noumea Explorer** (☎ 27 19 80; day pass 1000 CFP) bus service does an hourly

NOUMEA WALKING TOUR

The tour begins at the southern end of town at the market, and heads northeast past several attractive old buildings before going west down to the waterfront. If you're negotiating this tour with a wheelchair or pushchair, take rue Surcouf or, if it's too steep, rue de Verdun up to rue Frédéric Surleau.

Wake up early and head to Port Moselle for a breakfast of coffee and croissants at the **market** (1; p315). Wander over to admire the

WALK FACTS

Start Le Marché
Finish Gare Maritime
Distance 2km
Duration Two hours



amazing **Mwâ Ka** (2; right), then walk down av du Maréchal Foch to the corner of rue de la Somme for the **Bibliothèque Bernheim** (3; ☎ 24 20 90; 41 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 1-5.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-5.30pm Wed, to 4pm Sat), the attractive colonial-style public library with its old chandeliers and curved wooden staircases.

Turn right into rue de la Somme and walk along to the steps at the top of the street, which lead up the side of a building to rue Frédéric Surleau and **Cathédrale St Joseph** (4; right). From the cathedral, head north along blvd Vauban to the attractive old stone **Temple Protestant** (5) at the top of rue de l'Alma. Then head down to the charming **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (6; right), opposite Place des Cocotiers. From there, walk down to the waterfront and wander along to the Gare Maritime, where you can have lunch or a coffee at **Café de la Gare** (7; p319).

PLACE DES COCOTIERS

The natural starting point for exploring Noumea is Place des Cocotiers, in the heart of the city. The square slopes gently from east to west and at the top is a band rotunda, a famous landmark dating back to

the late 1800s, where teenagers often meet in the afternoon to show off their hip-hop dance moves. The square is a great place to stop for a rest or simply watch the world go by. Near the band rotunda there's a popular *pétanque* pitch and a giant chess board. The lower end of the Place des Cocotiers is like a lush botanical garden, with palms and large spreading trees.

Regular concerts and street markets are held in Place des Cocotiers. The popular **Judis du Centre Ville** (♻️ Thu evenings) street market has a different theme each week, outlined in *NC Pocket*, which you can pick up at the Noumea visitor information centre (see p311). Stalls sell arts and crafts, fresh produce, cakes and local dishes, and entertainment includes live music and traditional dance.

MUSÉE DE LA VILLE DE NOUMEA

The beautiful colonial-style **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (Noumea Museum; Map p318; ☎ 26 28 05; rue Jean Jaurès; admission 100 CFP; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Sat), dwarfed by towering palm trees, overlooks Place des Cocotiers. It features temporary and permanent displays on the early history of Noumea.

CATHÉDRALE ST JOSEPH

The **cathedral** (Map p318; ☎ 27 32 88; 3 rue Frédéric Surleau) was built in 1888 by convict labour and is one of Noumea's landmarks. It has beautiful stained-glass windows and an elaborately carved pulpit, altar panels and confessional. The main entrance is generally locked, but you should find the side doors open.

MUSÉE DE NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

The **Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Museum of New Caledonia; Map p318; ☎ 27 23 42; smp@gouv.nc; 42 av du Maréchal Foch; adult/child 200/50 CFP; ☎ 9-11.30am & 12.15-4.30pm Wed-Mon) provides an excellent introduction to traditional Kanak and regional Pacific culture. Local exhibits are displayed on the ground floor and regional artefacts on the mezzanine level.

MWÂ KA

The magnificent Mwâ Ka is erected in a landscaped square opposite Musée de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. The 12m totem pole is topped by a *grande case* (chief's hut), com-

plete with *flèche faitière* (carved rooftop spear), and its carvings represent the eight customary regions of New Caledonia. The Mwâ Ka is mounted as the mast on a concrete double-hulled *pirogue* (outrigger canoe), steered by a wooden helmsman, and celebrates Kanak identity as well as the multi-ethnic reality of New Caledonia.

LE MARCHÉ

The colourful multi-ethnic **market** (Map p318; ☎ 5am-11am) is beside the marina at Port Moselle. Enticing stalls sell fruit and vegetables, flowers, bread, cakes, olives, meat and fish. There's also an arts and crafts section where there's a busy café. On Saturday and Sunday a local street band keeps shoppers entertained. The market is at its busiest early in the morning.

MUSÉE DE L'HISTOIRE MARITIME

The **Musée de l'Histoire Maritime** (Maritime Museum; Map p312; ☎ 26 34 43; 11 av James Cook; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has exhibitions on early seafaring days in New Caledonia and the Pacific.

PARC ZOOLOGIQUE ET FORESTIER

The **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (Zoological and Botanical Gardens; Map p312; ☎ 27 89 51; rte de Laubarède; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 10.15am-5.45pm Tue-Sun, to 5pm 1 May-31 Aug) house native species such as the flightless *cagou*, *roussette* (fruit bat), *notou* pigeon and various parakeets. The gardens have an excellent network of paths through areas of native shrubs and trees, plus there's a café, playground and an enclosure with farm animals for children to pet.

The park is about 4km northeast of the city centre and is not easy to get to. No public buses run there but *le petit train* (see right) and Noumea Explorer buses (p313) run here from the city centre.

TJIBAOU CULTURAL CENTRE

The **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (☎ 41 45 45; www.adck.nc; adult/child 500 CFP/free, guided tours 1500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), named after the pro-independence Kanak leader who was assassinated in 1989, sits in a peaceful woodland and mangrove setting on Tina Peninsula behind the Magenta airport. The harmony that's been achieved between the centre's contemporary architecture (designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, who also

designed Paris' Pompidou Centre) and the surrounding landscape is amazing. The main buildings are a series of tall, curved wooden structures which rise majestically above the trees. The centre is a tribute to a remarkable man and aims to increase awareness and appreciation of the art and culture of New Caledonia and the Pacific. Displays include sculpture, paintings and photographs representing Kanak culture, as well as other cultures from around the Pacific. Behind the main building there are three traditional *grandes cases*; the centre publishes a concert programme. Amenities include a multimedia library, theatre, shop and café. Blue-line city buses and the Noumea Explorer bus (see p313) run regularly to the centre.

AQUARIUM

A new **Aquarium** (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 31; rte de l'Aquarium; adult/child/student/senior 650/115/210/300 CFP; ☎ 10am-4.45pm, closed Mon) was nearing completion at the time of writing, next to the old one at Anse Vata. The aquarium will house species found in New Caledonian waters, including nautilus, sea snakes, stone fish, turtles and sting rays. A living coral display will also be transferred there.

LE PETIT TRAIN

These miniature **trains** (☎ 77 80 51; adult/child 1300/700 CFP) are an entertaining way to discover Noumea. They do a city circuit tour as well as tours to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and Parc Zoologique et Forestier. Purchase tickets from the driver or from **Amac Tours** (Galerie Palm Beach, Anse Vata).

BEACHES

The two most popular beaches are at **Anse Vata** and **Baie des Citrons**. On a breezy day at Anse Vata you can watch the colourful kite- and wind-surfers skimming up and down the bay.

AROUND NOUMEA

There are many places close to Noumea which you can discover in a day or two by taking a tour (see p316).

Islets Around Noumea

The lagoon around Noumea is sprinkled with beautiful islets. Most are marine reserves and the clear waters surrounding

them are great for snorkelling. The most accessible are Île aux Canards, in Anse Vata bay, and Îlot Maître, 2km further west.

AMÉDÉE ISLET

This islet, about 20km south of Noumea, is a popular day-trip destination. It's famous for its tall white lighthouse, **Phare Amédée** (200 CFP), with its spiral staircase which you can climb. There's also a snack bar and curio shop.

Dumbéa

Dumbéa is 18km north of Noumea on the RT1. The area offers various activities, including hiking, swimming and canoeing.

MONTS KOGHIS

The turn-off to these mountains is on the RT1, 14km north of central Noumea. Monts Koghis are clad in rainforest and rich native flora, and they have several walking trails; the Direction des Ressources Naturelles (p348) publishes a free walking map.

Koghi Parc Adventure (Map p322; ☎ 43 02 52, 82 14 85; talon@mls.nc; 2000 CFP; ☞ 10am–4pm Sat & Sun, by reservation Mon–Fri), behind the auberge (see opposite), offers tree-top trails on swinging bridges and rope walks.

DUMBÉA RIVER

The Dumbéa River is popular during the hot summer months, as the shady park is a good picnic area and the river here is a popular swimming spot. The RT1 crosses the river at Parc Fayard, 16km north of Noumea. **Terra Incognita** (☎ 25 39 93, 78 94 46; terincognita@canl.nc) hires canoes and kayaks, and runs full-moon kayaking trips down the river.

Tours

Alpha International (Map p312; ☎ 27 24 20; www.alpha-tourisme.com; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata) Organises catamaran trips to islets and Le Ponton.

Amiral's Dream (☎ 77 16 21) This speedboat goes to Phare Amédée (7000 CFP) and the other islets (3000 to 5000 CFP). Departs from Port Moselle and also organises fishing trips.

Mary D (Map p312; ☎ 26 31 31; mary-d@offratel.nc; Galerie Palm Beach, Anse Vata; 11,350 CFP; ☞ 7.30am–noon & 1–6pm Mon–Fri, 8.30–noon Sat) Runs day trips to Phare Amédée, leaving from Port Moselle.

Pacific Charter (Map p318; ☎ /fax 26 10 55; www.pa.nc/charter) Organises sailing trips departing from Port Moselle.

Plages Loisirs (Map p312; ☎ 26 90 00; plageloisirs@mls.nc; promenade Roger Laroque) Runs taxi boats to Île aux Canards and Îlot Maître from a kiosk at Anse Vata.

Raid Ngatahi (☎ /fax 77 24 40; www.raid-ngatahi.nc; Noumea) Runs tailored speedboat excursions to islets in the southern lagoon for 18,500 CFP per day.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

The reef around Phare Amédée is a popular dive site, and you are likely to see sharks and rays. Noumea's dive clubs charge around 13,000 CFP for a two-day package; see p348 for details of the 'Plongée' discount card.

Alizé Diving (☎ 26 25 85; www.alizedive.com) At the Palm Beach complex at 127 promenade Roger Laroque at Anse Vata.

Amédée Diving Club (Map p318; ☎ 26 40 29; www.amedee.sponline.com; 28 rue du Générale Mangin)

Lagoon Safaris (☎ 24 18 04; www.lagoon-safaris.com) At Kuendu Beach Resort on the Nouville Peninsula.

Other Water Activities

Beneath the visitor information *faré* on the beach at Anse Vata, **Plages Loisirs** (Map p312; ☎ 26 90 00; plageloisirs@mls.nc; promenade Roger Laroque; per hr kayaks/windsurfers/fun boards/hobby cats 1500/2000/2500/4000 CFP; ☞ 7.30am–5.30pm) hires out various water-activity equipment. Some of the hotels at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata provide guests with an activity pass which entitles them to free use of Plages Loisirs' snorkelling equipment.

Locajet (Map p312; ☎ 77 79 79; www.locajet.info; 1/3hr 7000/12,000 CFP), in Nouville on the western side of Baie de la Moselle, rents jet skis. You can do a great circular trip by jet ski from Baie de la Moselle out to Île aux Canards, Îlot Maître and a few more islets which brings you back to the northern side of the Nouville peninsula on Baie de la Moselle.

NOUMEA FOR CHILDREN

Noumea has plenty of sights and activities for children. They can spend hours swimming or building sand castles at **Anse Vata** or **Baie des Citrons** beaches (p315). There are shady playgrounds at Baie de l'Orphelinat off rue du Générale de Gaulle, and next to the public swimming pool at Ouen Toro near Anse Vata. A ride on **le petit train** (p315) or a visit to the new **aquarium** (p315) are exciting possibilities, and **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (p315) is a must. There are children's **rides** (200 CFP; ☞ from 3pm Mon–Sun) in the car park

opposite the market. If you pop by **Place des Cocotiers** (p314) on a Thursday evening there are traditional dances to watch, candyfloss to eat and Liese's famous face-painting stall. And if the kids are getting cranky but you haven't finished shopping, promise them an ice cream. There are ice-cream bars at the Anse Vata shops, the Baie des Citrons shopping complex and Place des Cocotiers.

TOURS

One of the most popular tours of Noumea is organised by *le petit train* (see p315). The Noumea visitor information centre (p311) can recommend city-tour operators.

SLEEPING

Noumea has very few budget options but plenty of choices in the mid- to top-end price brackets.

Budget

Auberge de Jeunesse (Map p318; ☎ 27 58 79; yha.noumea@lagoon.nc; 51 bis rue Pasteur Marcel Ariège; dm/d 1400/3300 CFP) This sparkling-clean hostel, behind St Joseph's Cathedral, has a fantastic view overlooking the city and Baie de la Moselle. It's an HI member and charges 200 CFP extra for nonmembers. The quickest way to get there from the centre of town on foot is up the steps at the top of rue Jean Jaurès. Advance bookings are recommended.

Midrange

Hôtel Beaurivage (Map p312; ☎ 26 20 55; www.beaurivage.grands-hotels.cc; 7 promenade Roger Laroque; d 6050 CFP; ☞ ☎) This hotel at the northern end of Baie des Citrons is just across the road from the beach. Rooms have fridges and cost an extra 1000 CFP with a sea view.

Auberge du Mont Koghi (Map p322; ☎ 41 29 29; kogiland@offratel.nc; Dumbéa; r 6500–7500 CFP, chalets s/d 7500/9500 CFP, half board for 2,15,000 CFP) Overlooking Noumea and its bays, 476m above sea level, the auberge has chalets and more remote huts about a 10-minute walk into the forest. The restaurant has a fireplace and warm timber interior, and serves melted-cheese *raclette* (3900 CFP) and fondue (3300 CFP).

Casa del Sol (Map p312; ☎ 25 87 00; www.newcaledoniahotelsresorts.com; 10 rte de l'Aquarium; apartments 10,600–13,000 CFP) These spacious self-catering apartments behind Baie des Citrons are a couple of minutes' walk from the beach.

Lantana Beach Hôtel (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 12; lantan@canl.nc; 133 promenade Roger Laroque; s/d from 7750/8750 CFP) Rooms at this hotel across the road from the beach at Anse Vata have fridges and tea- and coffee-making facilities.

Hôtel Le Lagon (Map p312; ☎ 26 12 55; lelagon@offratel.nc; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata; d/4-person studio 10,350/13,350 CFP) This hotel has comfortable, self-catering rooms. It's a two-minute walk to Anse Vata beach.

Le Pacifique (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 00; resa@nchotels.com; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; d from 15,350 CFP; ☞ ☎) This place is attached to the top-end Nouvata Park Hôtel at Anse Vata but offers cheaper accommodation.

Top End

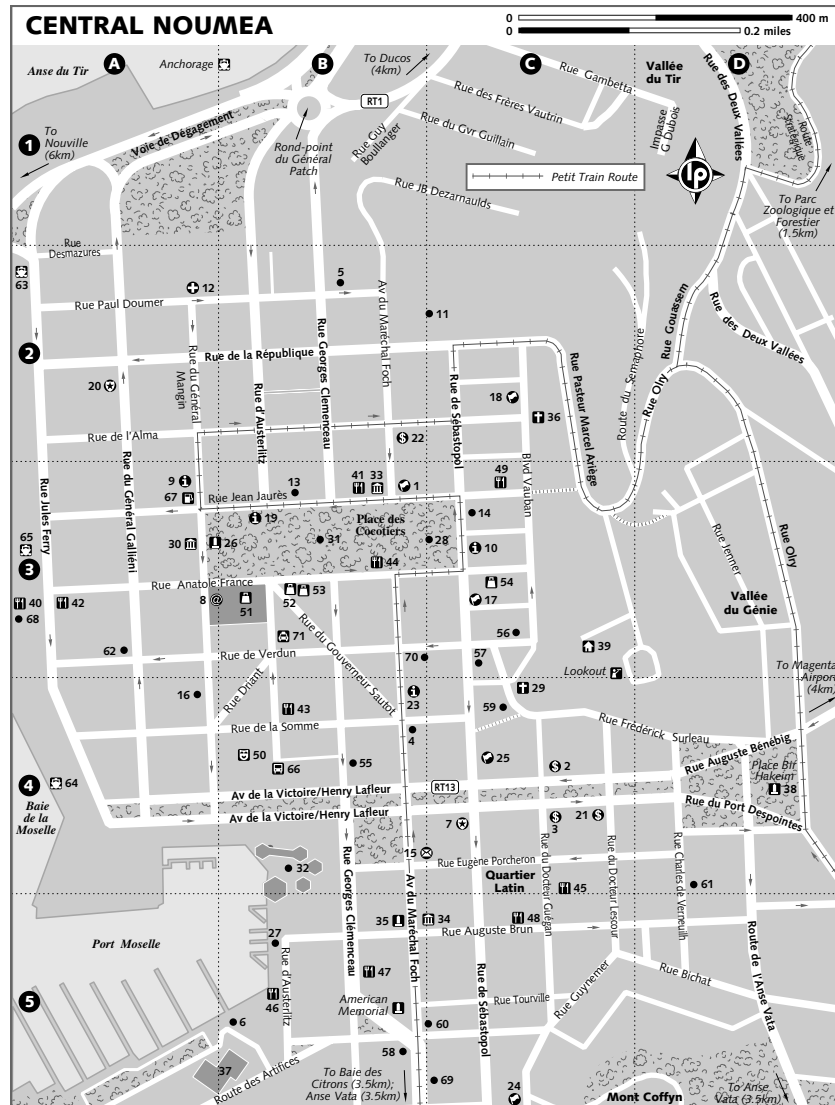
Ramada Plaza (Map p312; ☎ 23 90 00; www.ramada-plaza-noumea.nc; r from 16,900 CFP, st from 30,900 CFP) The rooms and suites at the twin-towered Ramada Plaza are tastefully decorated in contemporary Pacific style. Rooms have racecourse or sea views and facilities include a kids' club and spa. There's a revolving restaurant on the top floor (dishes from 2500 CFP).

Nouvata Park Hôtel (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 00; resa@nc.hotels.com; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; d with garden/beach view from 27,900/22,900 CFP; ☞ ☎) This four-star hotel is right in the middle of the tourist atmosphere at Anse Vata and has all the facilities you'd expect.

Hôtel Le Méridien (Map p312; ☎ 26 50 00; lemeridien@meridien.nc; Pointe Magnin; d 20,900–24,900 CFP, st 53,000 CFP; ☞ ☎) This five-star hotel at the southern end of Anse Vata beach has landscaped grounds, a relaxing pool area and several restaurants.

THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

Kuendu Beach Resort (☎ 24 30 30; kuendu.beach@lagoon.nc; over-water bungalows 35,000 CFP, garden/beach bungalows 12,150/18,150 CFP; ☞ ☎) By a sheltered bay on secluded Nouville Peninsula, the Kuendu Beach Resort has attractive thatched garden bungalows and romantic bungalows over the water with wooden decks which face the sunset. The pool, with water slides, is popular with children. Lunch is served at the beachfront restaurant and there's also a gourmet restaurant in an impressive thatched dining room.



Coral Palms Island Resort (☎ 26 05 12; resa@newcaledoniahotels.nc; Îlot Maître; bungalows with garden/beach view 40,500/45,500 CFP, over-water bungalows 60,500 CFP; 🍽️ 🌴) This idyllic hotel on Îlot Maître has bungalows set in a tropical garden and luxury over-water accommodation. There's a relaxing pool area and a wide range of water activities.

EATING

Noumea has an endless list of good restaurants specialising in French and international cuisine as well as seafood. There are also restaurants at the hotels listed in the Sleeping section (p317); three that we particularly recommend are Ramada's Le 360 panoramic revolving rooftop restaur-

INFORMATION		SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		ENTERTAINMENT 🎬	
Australian Consulate.....	1 B3	Admiral Oly Statue.....	26 A3	Ciné City.....	50 B4
Banque Calédonienne		Air Mer Loisir.....	27 B5	SHOPPING 🛍️	
d'Investissement (BCI).....	(see 8)	Amédée Diving Club.....	(see 16)	Galerie Noumea Centre.....	51 B3
Banque de Nouvelle Calédonie (BNC).....	2 C4	Band Rotunda.....	28 C3	L'Atelier des Femmes de Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	52 B3
Banque de Nouvelle Calédonie (BNC).....	3 C4	Cathédrale St Joseph.....	29 C4	L'Association des Sculpteurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	53 B3
Bibliothèque Bernheim.....	4 B4	Direction des Ressources Naturelles.....	(see 1)	Teeprint Boutique.....	54 C3
Bureau des Étrangers (Passport Office).....	5 B2	Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall).....	30 A3	TRANSPORT	
Capitainerie.....	6 B5	La Fontaine Céleste.....	31 B3	ADA.....	55 B4
Commissariat Central.....	7 C4	Le Marché.....	32 B4	Air Calédonie.....	56 C3
Cyber Noumea Centre.....	8 A3	Musée de la Ville de Nouméa.....	33 B3	Air France.....	57 C3
Destination Île des Pins.....	9 A3	Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	34 C5	Air New Zealand.....	58 B5
Destination Îles Loyauté.....	10 C3	Mwâ Ka.....	35 B5	Air Vanuatu.....	(see 58)
High Commission of the Republic.....	11 C2	Pacific Charter.....	(see 27)	Aircalin.....	59 C4
Hôpital Gaston Bourret.....	12 A2	Protestant Temple.....	36 C2	Arc en Ciel Voyages.....	60 C5
Librairie Calédo Livres.....	13 B3	South Province Headquarters.....	37 B5	Caltours.....	61 D4
Librairie Montaigne.....	14 C3	War Memorial.....	38 D4	CMA-CGM.....	62 A3
Main Post Office.....	15 B4	SLEEPING 🛏️		Ferry Terminal (Bélico).....	63 A2
Marine Corail.....	16 A4	Auberge de Jeunesse.....	39 C3	Ferry Terminal (Havannah).....	64 A4
Netherlands Consulate.....	17 C3	EATING 🍴		Gare Maritime (Cruise Ship Terminal).....	65 A3
New Zealand Consulate.....	18 C2	Café de la Gare.....	40 A3	Gare Routière (Bus Station).....	66 B4
Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud.....	19 B3	Café Shop.....	41 B3	Mobil Station.....	67 A3
Pharmacie Centrale.....	(see 51)	Casino Johnston Supermarket.....	42 A3	Nouméa Fun Ride.....	68 A3
Police Municipal.....	20 A2	Chinatown Mall.....	43 B4	Point Rouge.....	69 C5
Société Générale Bank.....	21 C4	Coco Glacé.....	44 B3	Qantas.....	70 B3
Société Générale Bank.....	22 B2	La Chaumière.....	45 C4	Taxi Rank.....	71 B3
Tourisme Province Nord.....	23 B4	Le Bout du Monde.....	46 B5		
UK Consulate.....	24 C5	Roulottes.....	47 B5		
Vanuatu Consulate.....	25 C4	Snack Loan.....	48 C5		
		Zanzibar.....	49 C3		

ant; Méridien's L'Hippocampe gourmet restaurant; and Kuendu's Le Grand Chêne gourmet restaurant. Many cafés and restaurants are closed on Sunday or Monday.

City Centre

You'll find numerous small and inexpensive *snacks* (small eateries) in Chinatown, in the southern part of the city centre. The sandwich bar opposite the Compact Mégastore in the Galerie Noumea Centre sells sandwiches, quiche, pizza and a mouthwatering selection of cakes and pastries.

Coco Glacé (Map p318; ☎ 24 99 89; Place des Cocotiers; lunch 350-500 CFP; 🍽️ 7am-6pm Mon-Sat) Coco Glacé serves ice creams, sorbets, crêpes and waffles at outdoor tables on a shady deck area.

Café Shop (Map p318; ☎ 24 99 89; 37 rue Jean Jaurès; sandwiches 350-500 CFP; 🍽️ lunch Mon-Fri) This popular sandwich bar near Musée de la Ville, opposite Place des Cocotiers, also serves paninis and burgers.

Café de la Gare (Map p318; ☎ 28 24 24; rue Jules Ferry; dishes 1000 CFP; 🍽️ 7am-4pm Mon-Sat) This café at the Gare Maritime serves quiches and salads and makes excellent coffee.

Quartier Latin & Port Moselle

Roulottes (Map p318; rue Georges Clémenceau; dishes around 600 CFP; 🍽️ dinner) These food vans in the large car park opposite the market serve great takeaway meals.

Snack Loan (Map p318; ☎ 27 13 51; rue August Brun; dishes 550 CFP; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This takeaway *snack* specialises in Asian food, including mouthwatering samosas, spring rolls and wontons, rice and noodle dishes. It's in a colonial house with a red roof.

La Chaumière (Map p318; ☎ 27 24 62; 13 rue du Guégan; dishes 2000 CFP; 🍽️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) An excellent choice for connoisseurs of French cuisine.

Le Bout du Monde (Map p318; ☎ 27 77 28; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivose; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This relaxed bar and restaurant next to the marina at Port Moselle serves a lunchtime salad buffet on week days.

Baie des Citrons

Baie des Citrons shopping complex at the southern end of the bay has a wide choice of restaurants serving seafood, crepes, salads and various international cuisines. There's also an ice-cream bar.

THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

Zanzibar (Map p318; ☎ 25 28 00; 51 rue Jean Jaurès; dishes 1500 CFP; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) One of the most popular restaurants in central Noumea, classy Zanzibar is tastefully decorated in warm tones. It serves international cuisine and a divine selection of desserts. At 1800 CFP, its three-course set lunch menu is excellent value.

La Fiesta Chez Alban (Map p312; ☎ 26 21 33; 5 promenade Roger Laroque; dishes 1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This colourful Basque restaurant serves dishes from the southwest of France, as well as pizzas.

Le Galapagos (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 18; 21 rue Jules Garnier; dishes 1600-1800 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The Galapagos is in Baie de l'Orphelinat, a short walk north from Baie des Citrons. It does a fantastic cheese buffet (1900 CFP) on Thursday evenings.

Anse Vata

There are several restaurants at the Anse Vata shops opposite the beach.

L'Amédée (Map p312; ☎ 26 10 35; 153 rte de l'Anse Vata; dishes 1000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This cosy restaurant is a good choice for lovers of seafood.

Snack Ulysse (Map p312; ☎ 28 69 28; rte de l'Anse Vata; sandwiches 400-650 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) The popular *snack* near Hôtel le Lagon serves generously filled hot or cold sandwiches, burgers, chips and rice dishes.

La Sorbetière (Map p312; ☎ 26 28 03) For a mouth-watering range of ice creams, waffles and crepes head to the Anse Vata shops.

Casa Italia (Map p312; ☎ 25 92 58; 113 rte de l'Anse Vata; small/large pizzas 1400/2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This Italian restaurant serves great pizzas and pasta dishes. It's about 800m from the beach, near the Shell petrol station.

Le Roof (Map p312; ☎ 25 07 00; 134 promenade Roger Laroque; dishes 2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon & Wed-Sun) This classy haven for gastronomes is built over the water at the southern end of Anse Vata, with tables overlooking the water and two large aquariums inside.

Dumbéa

Nakamal du Col (Dumbéa; kava per shell 100 CFP; ☎ 3.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 3.30pm-midnight Sat & Sun) This *nakamal* (kava house) on the RT1 has

small *farés* built on a terraced hillside. The site has a panoramic view over Noumea and its bays, and there are fantastic sunsets.

DRINKING Nightclubs

Most nightclubs are closed from Sunday to Tuesday. They usually open at around 10pm but don't really get going until after midnight.

In Baie des Citrons those in their late teens and early 20s head to **La Plage** (Map p312; Baie des Citrons shopping complex).

Anse Vata's nightclubs are spread along promenade Roger Laroque. Crowds in their 30s and 40s head to **Mister Swing** (Map p312; ☎ 24 03 93; 115 promenade Roger Laroque); **L'Acropole** (☎ 24 19 38; 119 promenade Roger Laroque); **Startruck** (Map p312; ☎ 26 17 54; promenade Roger Laroque) and **La Guinguette** (Map p312; ☎ 26 17 54; promenade Roger Laroque) at the western end of the bay; and **Cort'o Maltese** (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 25; 134 promenade Roger Laroque), on the small pier at the eastern end of the bay.

Bars

There are a handful of relaxed bars at the Baie des Citrons shopping complex, including **Malecon Café** (Map p312; ☎ 28 28 05), **Les 3 Brasseurs** (Map p312; ☎ 24 15 16) and **Ethnic** (Map p312; ☎ 27 20 20). They often have live music on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

At the eastern end of Anse Vata, **Bodega Del Mar** (Map p312; ☎ 26 11 53; 134 promenade Roger Laroque) is a trendy bar on the pier. **Bilboquet Plage** (Map p312; ☎ 26 46 60), opposite the beach, has an upstairs restaurant and a café that's a relaxing place for a drink.

Not far from the city centre, **Le Bout du Monde** (Map p318; ☎ 27 77 28; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivôse) at the Port Moselle marina is a pleasant place for a drink as well as a meal (see p319).

ENTERTAINMENT

The Noumea visitor information centre (see p311) publishes the *NC Pocket* (www.sortir.nc) entertainment guide. The majority of Noumea's nightlife happens at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata.

Cinemas

Ciné City (Map p318; ☎ 29 20 20; 18 rue de la Somme; admission 950 CFP) At the western end of av de la Victoire/Henri Lafleur, Ciné City

screens movies in French except during La Foa Film Festival in late June or early July, when movies are screened in their original language.

SHOPPING

You'll find shops selling French designer labels as well as prêt-à-porter outlets along rue de Sébastopol, rue de l'Alma and rue Jean Jaurès. There are also duty-free shops in this area. Two shops selling local clothing brands are **Teeprint Boutique** (Map p318; 48 rue Anatole France) and **Tricot Rayé** (Map p312; Galerie Commercial Port Plaisance).

L'Atelier des Femmes de Nouvelle-Calédonie (Map p318; cnr rue Gouverneur Sautot & rue Anatole France) sells local crafts and **L'Association des Sculpteurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Map p318; ☎ 77 51 24; rue Anatole France), next door, sells Kanak sculptures.

GRANDE TERRE

pop 210,000 / area 16,500 sq km

Measuring 400km long and 50km wide, Grande Terre (Main Land) is not only New Caledonia's major island but also the third-largest island in the Pacific after Papua New Guinea and NZ. A chain of mountains sweeps down the middle of the island, and the wide plains that stretch along its west coast are dotted with country towns where cattle breeders stroll down the street in Stetsons and cowboy boots. On the east coast the mountains descend to the sea, their lush vegetation meeting the steep and sinuous coastline. Waterfalls rush down the mountainsides into deep pools before trickling gently into the sea. Grande Terre is enclosed by the world's second-largest lagoon, where the islands' inhabitants spend much of their leisure time fishing, boating and enjoying other water sports.

THE FAR SOUTH

The main attraction of the Far South is its feeling of remote wilderness. The vast, empty region is characterised by its hardy scrub vegetation and red soil, and offers a wide range of activities including hiking, kayaking, abseiling and mountain biking. If you are looking for a bit of action and adventure while you're in New Caledonia, head to the Far South.

Transport

It's worth hiring a car for a day to explore the Far South; see p354 for car-rental agents in Noumea. From Noumea it is about 1½ hours to Yaté and two hours to Port Boisé by car.

For information on tours to the Far South, see p323. Buses to Yaté (600 CFP, two hours) leave from Noumea's Gare Routière at 11.30am Monday to Saturday.

Orientation & Information

To get to the Far South head east out of Noumea towards Mont-Dore. The easiest route is to follow the Voie Express out of Noumea to the RP1. The road forks when it reaches the mountain at La Coulée: you can take either the RP3 across to Yaté or continue along the RP1 south to Prony and Port Boisé, as the two routes eventually meet at the Chutes de la Madeleine.

A small **visitor information centre** (☎ 43 33 44; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) beside the RP1 at Boulari has information on accommodation and activities in the Far South, including several walking-track brochures.

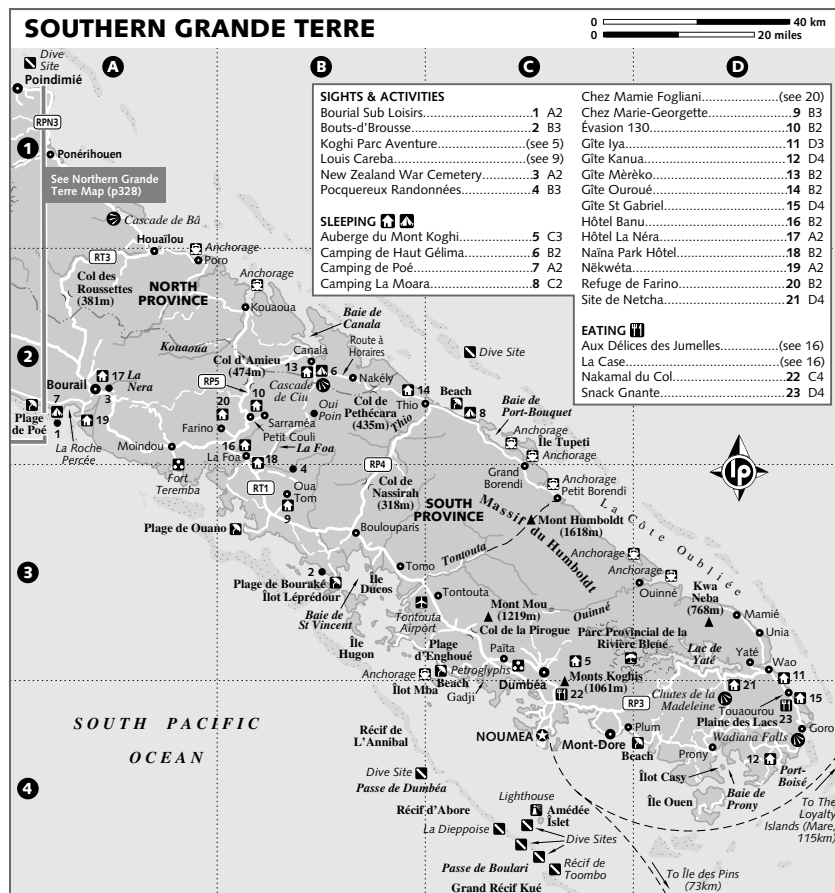
Sights & Activities

To get an idea of the range of activities you can get up to in the Far South, see the list of activity-based tours on p323.

PARC PROVINCIAL DE LA RIVIÈRE BLEUE

If you take the RP3 from La Coulée you will arrive at the western end of the artificial **Lac de Yaté**, a hydroelectric dam. Located here is **Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue** (☎ 43 61 24; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 7am-5pm Tue-Sun, entry closes 2pm), a protected nature reserve that's home to many bird species, including the *cagou*. The park's landscape is a mixture of the Far South's typical scrub vegetation and dense rainforest. One of the park's famous features is a drowned forest where old tree trunks protrude from the water.

To the west and northwest of the park are the Rivière Blanche and Rivière Bleue, Lac de Yaté's main tributaries. If you have your own vehicle you can drive along the banks of Rivière Blanche to the end of the road, 18km from the park entrance. The road on the Rivière Bleue side of the park is closed to vehicles but you can walk or bike there, or kayak up the river. At the time of writing, the park was planning to introduce a shuttle bus on the Rivière Bleue side.



There is a visitor information centre by the entrance gate which has good displays in English and French on the park's flora and fauna. At the entrance you will also find free maps which outline the park's many walks.

CHUTES DE LA MADELEINE

This small **waterfall** (☎ 46 92 47; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 8am-5pm) sits in a botanic reserve in the middle of a vast plain. Swimming is forbidden at the waterfall but permitted about a kilometre downstream at **Site de Netcha** (☎ 46 92 47; adult/child 1000/500 CFP), which has wooden diving platforms over the river and shelters and tables overlooking the water. Camping here costs 200/100 CFP per adult/

child. You can picnic and swim for free between the waterfall and Netcha where the road runs beside the river.

To get to the waterfall from the RP3, take the signposted road turning towards the eastern end of the Lac de Yaté; it is 11km to the waterfall. This road joins the road connecting Prony and Port Boisé a few kilometres further on.

YATÉ & CASCADE DE WADIANA

From the eastern end of Lac de Yaté the RP3 winds to the top of a mountain, then drops steeply to the sea. If you turn right at the bottom of the escarpment, and cross a small bridge, the road leads past Wao to tourist gîtes and camp sites. If you continue, the

road veers left to Yaté village, where there's a small shop and petrol pump.

South of Wao you come to Touaourou then Goro. At Goro the road passes beside **Wadiana Falls** which cascade down a rocky slope into a natural pool where you can swim. From Goro you can go on, past the rusting remnants of an iron-mining operation, to Port Boisé and round past Prony back to Noumea.

PORT BOISÉ

Port Boisé is an isolated bay surrounded by forest, 6.5km from the turn-off on the main road. The only infrastructure here is a gîte. There are enjoyable walking tracks along the coast and to a lookout point behind the gîte.

PRONY

Once a convict centre, the small settlement of Prony sits in a lush hollow surrounded by forest beside Baie de Prony. A stream runs through the village of corrugated-iron cottages and overgrown stone ruins. It's a charming place to wander through or enjoy a picnic beside the sea. The GR1 walking track starts about 500m south of the village at Baie de la Somme, which is part of the larger Baie de Prony. Whale-watching trips also leave from here from July to September (see right).

GR1 WALKING TRACK

The **GR1** (Grande Randonnée 1; www.trekking-gr-sud-nc.com) is a two- to three-day (44.4km) walk between Prony and Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. It begins at the sea and traverses a diverse landscape of plains, forests, hills and streams, with magnificent views over the hills to the sea along the way. To overnight, you can bunk down in a hut at Refuge des Néocallitropsis (3km from the road) at the end of the first leg (14km) or pitch your tent at Site de Netcha (500m from the road) at the end of the second leg (10.8km). Either way, drop-offs or pick-ups need to be arranged. The track is part of an ongoing project which will eventually traverse the whole of the Southern Province from south to north.

You must arrange transfers to Prony, Refuge des Néocallitropsis or Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue through the office at **Site de Netcha** (☎ 46 92 47), near the Chutes de la Madeleine.

Tours

The following operators run activities and activity-based tours in the Far South. Most rates are based on a minimum of two adults.

Adventure Pulsion (☎ 26 27 48; aventure@canl.nc; 4WD per adult per day 12,000 CFP, kayak or mountain bike per half-/full-day 2500/4500 CFP) Specialises in 4WD tours and hires out kayaks and mountain bikes at Site de Netcha. Adventure Pulsion has an office in Noumea (Map p312).

Caledonia Tour (☎ 25 94 24; caledoniastours@lagoon.nc; adult/child 9500/6000 CFP) Runs minibus tours of the Far South and specialises in bird-watching and botanic tours.

Koghi Decouverte/Sud Loisir (☎ 77 81 43; koghidecouverte@hotmail.com; mountain bikes 1800 CFP, mountain bikes and kayaks adult/child 5750/4600 CFP) Hires mountain bikes and kayaks in Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. It also offers return transfers between Noumea and the park (2500 CFP).

Pacific Blue (☎ 77 80 52; ggarnier-iruka@mail.com; adult/child 7500/5500 CFP) Runs whale-watching trips in the Far South on a catamaran.

Pacific Free Ride (☎ 79 22 02; www.pfr.nc; canoe half-/full-day 5000/10,000 CFP, quad bikes half-/full-day 10,000/17,000 CFP, abseiling 8000 CFP) Offers canoe trips in Baie de Prony and abseiling down the falls at Goro or Yaté.

Raid Ngatahi (☎ 77 24 40; www.kujirado.com; per person 18,000 CFP) Runs whale-watching excursions on a motorised boat south of Baie de Prony, including lunch on Îlot Casey.

Téranga (☎ 35 49 54; willypetrel@hotmail.com; adult/child 7500/5500 CFP) Runs whale-watching trips on a catamaran departing from Prony.

Terra Incognita (☎ 25 39 93, 78 94 46; terincognita@canl.nc; kayaks half-/full-day/full moon 3350/5350/3950 CFP, 4WD per adult 9880 CFP) Hires out kayaks in Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (minimum of six required).

Sleeping & Eating

The following accommodation places are all on the coast south of Yaté. They all serve meals to nonguests but you must book in advance. You can also camp at Site de Netcha (see opposite), where there is no electricity and you must take drinking water.

Gîte Iya (☎ 46 90 80; bungalows 5000 CFP, camping per tent 1500 CFP) This gîte is on a signposted turn-off, just south of Wao. The rustic but comfortable bungalows are set in a coconut grove beside a small private beach, and bungalow rates are for up to three people. Set menus are available for 1800 CFP (closed for dinner on Sunday). When the sea is

calm you can snorkel along the fringing reef not far from the beach.

Snack Gnante (☎ 46 40 40; dishes 850 CFP; ☎ 6am-7pm) This small eatery is about 1km south of Touaourou on the main road. Dishes include prawns and rice, and octopus salad.

Gîte St Gabriel (☎ 46 42 77; www.gitesaintgabriel.com; modern/traditional bungalows 7500/6500 CFP, camping adult/child 700/350 CFP) St Gabriel sits on wide lawns sweeping down to the beach about 3km south of Touaourou; bungalow rates are for two people. The restaurant serves excellent seafood platters, which must be ordered in advance, and a set menu costs 1900 CFP. The sea here is shallow but it is a peaceful spot and you can go for long walks along the beach. Canoes and bikes can be hired for 500 CFP per half-day.

Gîte Kanua (☎ 46 90 00; fax 46 91 22; bungalows s/d 7350/14,700 CFP, camping per adult/child 800/500 CFP) This gîte is the only infrastructure you will find at isolated Port Boisé. It has a small camp site and four thatched traditional-style bungalows with private bathrooms (rates for bungalows include half board). The water in front of the beach is shallow but you can snorkel further out on the edge of the fringing reef. The gîte can arrange excursions to offshore islets and 4WD tours (10,000 CFP for two people, and 1000 CFP per extra person), as well as kayaking, canoeing and windsurfing (600 CFP per hour). It also organises *bougna* for visitors at a local *tribu* (3600 CFP) – a traditional Kanak meal of yam, *taro* and sweet potatoes with chicken, fish or crustaceans, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in coconut milk in an earth oven.

CENTRAL GRANDE TERRE

Not far from the cosmopolitan capital, a different travel experience awaits you. Central Grande Terre offers enriching cultural experiences, coastal scenery and mountain treks. On the west coast you can stay in a Kanak *tribu* or on a Caldoche farm and explore the surrounding countryside by foot or on horse back. On the east coast, in Thio and Canala, there are simple camp sites in beautiful coastal and riverside settings.

Transport

Several buses a day from Noumea stop in the west-coast towns. There is a daily bus to Thio and Canala from Noumea, but no

connecting services between the two towns. For bus schedules and fares, see p354.

Orientation & Information

The west-coast settlements of Bourail and La Foa are the main towns in the region. Both have a *gendarmerie*, pharmacy, post office, bank and supermarket.

The friendly and efficient staff at the **visitor information centre** (☎ 41 69 11; www.lafoa.com; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun), La Foa Tourisme, can advise on accommodation and activities in La Foa, Farino and Sarraméa.

Boulouparis

Trips to **Îlot Ténia**, a beautiful sandy islet surrounded by clear waters near the barrier reef, depart from Boulouparis. The turn-off to Bouraké beach, the departure point for trips to the islet, is at the northern end of Boulouparis. Îlot Ténia is a popular surfing, diving and snorkelling spot.

Bouts-d-Brousse (☎ 43 29 62; www.boutsdbrousse.com; half-day trips per adult/child 4500/2600 CFP, full-day 6600/3640 CFP, diving half-/full-day 7800/10,900 CFP) organises trips to the island which include dolphin watching. The dolphins are great fun, especially for children. Take your own picnic lunch. The company also runs surfing trips to the reef and day trips from Noumea (adult/child 14,040/7800 CFP) which include lunch.

La Foa

La Foa is a neat and tidy town 1½ hours from Noumea. The **sculpture garden** (☎ 8am-8pm Sep-Apr, 8am-6pm May-Aug) behind La Foa Tourisme features wonderful sculptures by artists from throughout New Caledonia. The garden is a pleasant place for a picnic, with a children's playground and public toilets.

Sarraméa, 15 minutes' drive north of La Foa, sits in a lush valley surrounded by mountains. At the end of the road a path continues through a farm gate and past an old colonial house to **Trou Feuillet**, also known as *la cuve*, a refreshing rock pool in a mountain stream. On the main road, just past the Sarraméa turn-off, is **tribu de Petit Couli**, where a beautiful old *grande case* stands at the end of a row of tall araucaria pines.

Farino is a mountain village known for its produce and craft markets held every second Sunday of the month. The real crowd

puller is its Vers de Bancoule market day in September, which culminates in a contest to see who can eat the most fat, wriggling white grubs.

The **Refuge de Farino** (☎ 44 37 61; refuge.farino@lagoon.nc) organises quad-bike tours (5000/1000 CFP per first/subsequent hour) in the forest around Farino. The turn-off to Farino is on the road to Sarraméa.

There are many enjoyable walks and horse treks in the La Foa region. Most places offer half- or full-day treks and some offer overnight treks.

Louis Careba (☎ 44 38 17; 1/3hr guided walks per person 1000/2000 CFP, 1/2hr horse treks 2500/3100 CFP) Louis offers historical and botanical walking trails and short horse treks in *tribu* de Oua Tom. The turn-off is 13km south of La Foa.

Pocquereux Randonnées (☎ 77 32 54; half-/full-/2-day trek 5000/8000/20,000 CFP) The turn-off to this ranch is 3km south of La Foa.

Tribu de Oui Poin (☎ 41 72 81, 35 45 22; guided walk 500-2000 CFP, half-/full-day horse trek 2500/5000 CFP) In the mountains 25km east of La Foa. Overnight walks or horse treks to Canala can also be arranged.

Bourail

With a rural atmosphere and strong Caldoche community, Bourail is the next biggest town on Grande Terre after Noumea. The main road crosses the Néra River bridge at the southern end of town, and the turn-off to La Roche and Poé beach is immediately after the bridge.

An old stone building 500m south of the centre houses the **Musée de Bourail** (☎ 44 12 18; adult/student 250/100 CFP; ☎ 8-11am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri; 8-11am & 1-4pm Sat; 8-11am & 1-3pm Sun). Its displays include objects relating to the presence of US and NZ troops in Bourail during WWII and a guillotine complete with the basket where the decapitated head was placed. The guillotine was brought to New Caledonia in 1867 although the one in the museum is a later model. Behind the museum there's a *case*.

Bourail holds a hugely popular **country fair** over the weekend that falls closest to 14 August, when there are farm animals on display, and produce and arts and crafts for sale. There are also children's rides, food stalls and, the highlight, a rodeo.

About 9.5km south of Bourail is the well-tended **New Zealand War Cemetery**, where over 200 NZ soldiers killed in the Pacific during

WWII are buried. New Zealand troops set up a hospital in the area during the war, and many locals received free medical care there. A ceremony is held at the cemetery every Anzac Day (25 April) and local children place a flower on each grave.

La Roche, 7km west of Bourail on the coast, has two famous rock formations: **La Roche Percée** (pierced rock) and **Le Bonhomme**, a rock shaped like a tubby man. A walking track begins at the base of the cliff near the rocks and follows the coast for 4km past Baie des Tortues (Turtle Bay) to Baie des Amoureux (Lover's Bay).

There's a panoramic viewing point above Le Bonhomme where you can often spot turtles in Baie des Tortues below. With its bent araucarias and wide beach, Baie des Tortues is a beautiful spot but beware of the strong currents. To get there by car, follow the main road round to the right instead of turning left to La Roche. As you ascend the hill, turn onto the dirt road to the left. By foot, follow the coastal walk from the base of the cliff near Le Bonhomme.

The dive club **Bourail Sub Loisirs** (☎ 44 20 65, 78 20 65; butterfly.diving@lagoon.nc; 2-dive package 11,000 CFP) is located at the southern end of La Roche at the Néra River mouth. Surfing trips to the barrier reef and boat trips (from 3000 CFP) can be arranged through Nêk-wéta (see p326). You can also surf from the beach at the mouth of the Néra River.

Plage de Poé is a beautiful, long white-sand beach 9km north of La Roche. On the beach at Poé, near the camp site, **La Base Nautique de Poe** (☎ 44 23 27; basenautique@lagoon.nc) hires kayaks (1100 CFP per hour), windsurfers (2600 CFP per hour) and mountain bikes (1000 CFP per hour). Glass-bottom boat tours cost 1800 CFP.

Thio & Canala

These two east-coast towns are in the heart of mining country, and the destructive mining practices of the past have left terrible scars on the mountains, especially around Thio. Don't be put off, though, as where the landscape has been left intact it is beautiful. There are a couple of lovely beaches in Thio where you can camp. Thio also has a small **mining museum** (☎ 44 51 77; adult/child 200 CFP/free; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun).

A scenic coastal drive from Thio heads 30km south to Petit Borendi. On a sunny

day the starkly contrasting red, green and blue of the earth, vegetation, sea and sky are amazing.

Between Thio and Canala is a 13km stretch known as *route à horaires* (literally, 'schedule road'). It's a one-way system that works on an alternating schedule: cars depart at odd hours from the Thio end, between 5am and 5pm, and at even hours from the Canala end, between 6am and 6pm. You can only enter the road in the first 20 minutes of the hour. All is explained at the Thio end, where the single-lane road drops away vertically on one side. After dark, traffic becomes two way. Don't try to find out why.

The views from the valley looking up at the 60m **Cascade de Ciu** and vice versa are spectacular. To abseil down the waterfall get in touch with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP). The more people on the trip, the cheaper it is. The turn-off is a couple of kilometres south of Canala. It isn't signposted, so look out for the sealed road that leads up the hill beside a green corrugated-iron shop.

Sleeping & Eating LA FOA & AROUND

Hôtel Banu (☎ 44 31 19; fax 44 35 50; d 4350 CFP, d bungalows 6350 CFP; ☎ ☎) This hotel is in the middle of La Foa, with accommodation behind the hotel building. The hotel has a restaurant (dishes 1200 to 2000 CFP), and the ceiling in the bar next to it is covered with over 4700 caps. If you don't believe us you can count them yourself.

Naina Park Hôtel (☎ 44 35 40; tr bungalows 7300 CFP; ☎ ☎) This hotel south of town has bungalows in a shady garden, a relaxing pool area and a restaurant (dishes 1800 to 2200 CFP).

Évasion 130 (☎ 44 55 77; bungalows d/child 13,500/1000 CFP; ☎ ☎) A modern hotel overlooking a stream at the end of the road in Sarra-méa. Meals in the restaurant cost 1500 to 3500 CFP.

Refuge de Farino (☎ 44 37 61; refuge.farino.lagoon.nc; camping per adult/child 600/300 CFP, bungalows d/child 5000/1000 CFP) On a hillside in a forest, this refuge has wooden bungalows with kitchenettes. It's 4km from the Farino *mairie* (town hall).

Chez Marie-Georgette (☎ 44 38 17; camping per tent 1000 CFP) The table d'hôte in *tribu* de

Oua Tom has camp sites and serves Kanak cuisine including *bougna*, and chicken or prawn dishes (set menu 2000 to 2500 CFP). Book 24 hours in advance.

La Case (☎ 81 83 23; coffee 250 CFP, cake 100-300 CFP; ☎ 5.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun) This café on the main road north of the centre of La Foa serves cakes, pastries and a variety of coffees.

Chez Mamie Fogliani (☎ 43 23 14; set menu 1500-3000 CFP) Mamie Fogliani's table d'hôte serves filling Caldoche cuisine including venison, wild pig, fish and duck dishes. It's 3km from the Farino *mairie*.

Aux Délices des Jumelles (☎ 43 46 65; set menu 2500 CFP) This table d'hôte near the chapel on the main road in Sarra-méa serves Kanak cuisine. Order a day in advance and BYO.

BOURAIL

Camping de Poé (☎ 41 28 78; camping per tent/person from 1000/100 CFP, bungalows 2500 CFP) The small wooden bungalows at this camp site by the beach are unfurnished. The site has hot showers, a small shop, and a food bar open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Nékwéta (☎ 41 90 81; www.nekweta.com; case adult/child 3000/1500 CFP) The attractive camp site is set in a garden at La Roche, 200m from the beach. Turn left at La Roche Percée, then left again 700m further on.

Hôtel La Néra (☎ 44 16 44; s/d 5700/6700 CFP; ☎ ☎) This hotel with comfortable rooms and a river view is by the Néra River bridge. Dishes at the hotel's restaurant are 1800 CFP.

Mambo Café (☎ 44 29 30; dishes 1350-1600 CFP; ☎ 6am-1.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm) Mambo Café specialises in Asian dishes and also does pizzas (small/large 1350/2450 CFP); it's in town.

Snack Hibiscus (☎ 44 12 17; dishes 950 CFP, snacks 350-500 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sun) This busy place in town does paninis, toasted sandwiches and burgers, as well as rice and meat dishes. There are also a couple of food vans at the northern end of town.

THIO & CANALA

Thio's and Canala's camp sites have attractive settings but their bathrooms leave a bit to be desired.

Camping La Moara (☎ 44 51 84; camping per tent 1500 CFP) This grassy camp site sits by a white beach curved around a small bay. It's 11km southeast of Thio.

Gîte Ouroué (☎ 44 50 85; camping per tent/person 1000/150 CFP, bungalows 4000 CFP) North of Thio, this gîte is in a coconut grove beside a remote beach. You can camp anywhere on the long shady stretch of lawn, or stay in one of the sparsely furnished bungalows (they have bathrooms). Meals are 1800 CFP, and half-day kayak hire costs 300 CFP.

Camping de Haut Gélina (☎ 78 64 90; camping per tent 1000 CFP) Also known as Camping Kouré, this tranquil camp site is in a lush garden beside the river flowing from Cascade de Ciu. It's 1.5km from the main road and around 3km south of Canala; the turn-off is signposted. Guided walks here cost 300 CFP per person.

Gîte Méréko (☎ 42 84 42; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case adult/child 1200/800 CFP, d case 3000 CFP) This gîte in *tribu* de Kuinet is on the road to Cascade de Ciu. It's a place where you can get to know the locals, and the *cases* are a modern version of the traditional structures. Meals are 1800 CFP and guided walks cost 300 CFP per person.

Entertainment

Cinéma Jean-Pierre Jeunet (☎ 43 16 67; admission 800 CFP; ☎ evenings Mon, Fri, Sat & Sun) The small theatre in La Foa predominantly screens movies in French except during its annual film festival in late June or early July, when movies are projected in their original language.

NORTHWEST COAST

Much of the northwest coast and its rolling plains is taken up by cattle ranches. The coast is not great for swimming, as it has mangrove swamps and shallow bays, so it makes more sense to head inland for horse trekking, staying on a Caldoche farm or in a Kanak homestay.

Transport

Air Calédonie has two flights a week between Noumea and Koné; for detailed information see p353. There are daily buses from Noumea to Koné and Koumac; see p354 for fares and schedules. Three buses a week travel from Koumac to Poum. The gare routière (bus station; Rue Roger Trouillot) 300m from the roundabout in Koumac has schedules for buses going north to Poum and northeast to Ouégoa and Pouébo.

Orientation & Information

Koné, the Northern Province capital, is surprisingly plain and smaller than Koumac, further north. Both towns have a post office, *gendarmerie*, clinic, pharmacy, supermarkets and banks with ATMs. Pouembout, 8km south of Koné, is in many ways an extension of the capital. The remote region north of Koumac is known as the Far North.

Le Cybercafé de Koné (☎ 47 17 00; microforma@mls.nc; Internet per 30 min/hr 600/900 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) The only cyber café in the north at the time of writing. It's 50m down the dirt road opposite the market and court house.

Visitor information centre ☎ 42 78 42; www.koumac-tourisme.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Koumac Tourisme is at the northern end of town, opposite the post office.

Pouembout & Koné Region

Koné is noted for its excellent horse-trekking opportunities. The following places organise treks into the foothills or to the summits of the central mountain range.

Centre d'accueil d'Atéou (per person per hr 1000 CFP) In *tribu* d'Atéou; see p328.

Koné Rodéo (☎ 47 21 51; 1-/3-day trip 8000/24,000 CFP) Signposted 2km north of Koné.

Ranch du Carré 9 (☎ 44 21 87; 1-/2-/3-day trip 8000/16,000/22,000 CFP) From Voh it's 17km inland.

North of Koné, in Voh, there's a mangrove swamp which has developed some unusual natural designs. The most intriguing is a perfect heart shape, the **Coeur de Voh**, which is on the cover of *Earth from Above*, the book of aerial photography by famous photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand. The heart is best seen from the air. **Alain Nouard** (☎ 47 25 93) or **Pierre Couget** (☎ 47 32 87) from the ultra-light club in Koné can fly you there in a microlight for 5000 CFP. Book several days in advance.

Koumac

Located near the roundabout, eye-catching **Église Ste Jeanne d'Arc** was constructed in 1950 out of a WWII aircraft hangar. Take a peek inside at its stained-glass windows and traditionally inspired wood carvings.

The Far North

Most visitors to the Far North head past Poum, the only (tiny) town, straight to Relais de Poingam (see p329), where sportfishing

Houailou to Poindimié

If you are heading up the northeast coast you will probably arrive by the RT3 from Bourail. The road veers north at a roundabout (there is only one) in Houailou, just before crossing over a long bridge.

There is a lovely picnic spot at **Cascade de Bâ** (car/adult 100/50 CFP), a waterfall beside a large pool where you can cool off. It's 13.5km north of the Houailou bridge. Turn down the gravel track immediately after the bridge at the northern end of *tribu* de Bâ.

Thrill seekers can abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP). A minimum of two people is required and it's cheaper if there are more. Arrange the trip 48 hours in advance.

Poindimié

The largest town on the coast, Poindimié has a picturesque coastline and the peaceful Ina, Napoémien and Amoa River valleys stretching inland, where you can admire the natural bush or pretty *tribu* gardens. They are delightful places for a walk or a scenic drive. Ina valley is at the southern end of town. To get to Napoémien turn inland at the *mairie*. In Amoa valley you can explore the lush southern side of the river or more populated northern side. Turn either before or after the bridge just before the church at Tié Mission.

Poindimié overlooks **Îlot de Tibarama**, an islet just offshore. **Tiéti Diving** (☎ 42 42 05; www.tietti-diving.com; 2-dive package 12,000 CFP) is run by a friendly instructor who also offers transfers to Îlot de Tibarama (per person 1500 CFP), a great spot to relax, snorkel and swim.

The scenic Koné–Tiwaka Rd (RPN2) crosses the central mountain range between Koné on the west coast and Poindimié on the east. The road winds through the mountains, over high river bridges and past forested slopes, before joining the east coast 14km north of Poindimié at the Tiwaka River mouth. Halfway through the mountains you can detour via *tribu* de Bopope, with its charming bark-and-thatch *cases* perched on the edge of steep slopes.

Hienghène

This serene village is tucked into the foothills on the shores of Baie de Hienghène, at the mouth of the Hienghène River. The area has fascinating rock formations and

it is also important historically, as it was the home of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the pro-independence leader who was assassinated on Ouvéa in 1989 (see p339). People still speak of Tjibaou with great respect, and he is buried in Tiendanite, a *tribu* 20km up the Hienghène valley.

Hienghène's renowned **Poule Couveuse** (Brooding Hen) rock formation sits on one side of the entrance to Baie de Hienghène, facing the sphinx on the other. You can view these two rock formations from the signposted lookout, 2km south of the village. There's a better profile of the sphinx about 1.5km north of the village.

The **Lindéralique rocks** are towering black limestone rocks with jagged edges, which begin about 10km south of Hienghène. At Lindéralique, about 4km south of Hienghène, you can kayak beneath the rocks. There is also a large cave, **Grotte de Lindéralique** (adult/child 200/100 CFP), which you can visit. To get there follow the signposted turn-off 2.5km south of Hienghène.

Hienghène's small **Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat** (☎ /fax 42 80 74; culturehienghene@mls.nc; museum adult/child 150 CFP/free; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Thu, to 4pm Fri & Sat, 9am–noon Sun) has various exhibitions, a museum, a couple of *cases* and a sculptor's workshop. It organises jazz, choral and classical concerts at Grotte de Lindéralique once a month.

Babou Côté Océan (☎ 42 83 59; www.babou-plongee.com; 1/2 dives 5500/10,600 CFP, half-day island excursion 4500 CFP), at the camp site in *tribu* de Koul-noué (see opposite), organises boat trips.

Hienghène to Pouébo

This is the wildest and most stunning stretch of the northeast coast. It's covered in tropical vegetation, and waterfalls and streams rush down the mountains to join the sea.

New Caledonia's last surviving **river ferry** carries vehicles across the wide Ouaième River, 17km northwest of Hienghène. It's free and runs 24 hours a day. The ferry's uniqueness makes the crossing one of the highlights of the journey.

The **Cascade de Tao** plummets down a mountainside 7km north of the Ouaième River ferry. A path leads to the bottom of the falls starting at the cottage just after Tao bridge (200 CFP). You can abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP).

The track to **Mont Panié** (1629m), New Caledonia's highest peak, leaves from Tao. It's a two-day hike but you first need authorisation from the **Direction du Développement Economique et de L'Environnement** (DDEE; ☎ 42 72 52) office in Poindimié. For guided walks in the region, including the climb to Mont Panié and to Cascade de Tao, contact **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 42 87 77; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri). Guided walks cost around 12,000 CFP for one day and 18,000 CFP for two days based on a maximum of four; you need to get authorisation from DDEE even if you go up Mont Panié with a guide.

Pouébo to Ouégoa

The rugged coastal scenery changes to rolling hills, plains and mangrove swamps at Pouébo. Inside Pouébo's large Catholic church there's a marble **mausoleum** where the remains of Bishop Douarre, who set up New Caledonia's first Catholic mission, are interred. The mission was founded at Balade, where the first Europeans arrived in New Caledonia.

In 1843 Bishop Douarre arrived there with a group of Catholic missionaries and the stained-glass windows in the small church beside the road here tell the eventful story: the first mass at Balade on Christmas Day 1843, the murder of Brother Blaise by angry and starving Kanaks in 1847, the missionaries' escape to the French navy ship *La Brillante*, and the return of Brother Blaise's skull to Bishop Douarre in 1849. In 1853, France officially laid claim to New Caledonia at Balade, the same year in which Douarre died.

An altar beneath an enormous banyan tree at **Mahamat beach** commemorates the place where the first Catholic mass was held on Christmas Day 1843. The turn-off to the beach is 1.5km north of the church.

Nine kilometres north of Balade the road heads inland over Col d'Amoss (Amoss Pass) towards Ouégoa, then across to the west coast.

Sleeping & Eating

Unless otherwise stated, most camp sites below are in coconut groves by the sea and don't have hot water.

POINDIMIÉ

Camping Tiakan (☎ 42 85 14; camping per person 500 CFP) A peaceful camp site, 22km south of

Ponérihouen, with thatched shelters and hot water.

Gîte Newe Jie (☎ 42 70 74; bungalows s/d/extra person 3100/4200/1000 CFP, case per person 2100 CFP, baby cot 600 CFP) This gîte in Vallée d'Ina offers comfortable and impeccably clean accommodation, with a large well-equipped kitchen and dining area. Take the Vallée d'Ina turning 2km south of Poindimié and follow the signposts illustrated with a hut. The gîte is also signposted.

Monitél de Tiéti (☎ 42 64 00; s/d 6760/7800 CFP child free; ☎ ☎) The beachfront hotel here was about to undergo major renovations at the time of writing.

La Bicyclette Bleu (☎ 78 58 69; snacks 350 CFP; ☎ 6am–1pm Mon–Fri) Serves cappuccinos (400 CFP), paninis, sandwiches, pizza and a selection of sweet pastries. Turn left as you go up the hill past Poindimié Discount.

Snack Le Banian (☎ 86 64 81; dishes 1000–1700 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon–Fri, lunch Sat) A *snack* under two large banyan trees selling meals such as steak and chips and light snacks.

Chez Simone (☎ 42 74 84; ppswc@lagoon.nc; dishes from 1800 CFP) This welcoming table d'hôte (where guests share a communal home-cooked meal) serves Kanak cuisine. Dishes are based around wild deer, pig or fish. The turn-off is 4km south of Poindimié and it's another 3.5km to Simone's in *tribu* de Nessapoé.

HIENGHÈNE

In the Hienghène valley there are many **accueil en tribu** (per person around 800 CFP), traditional homestays where you can experience life with a Kanak family. Visitors usually sleep on mattresses in a *case* and take part in everyday activities and meals (breakfast 400 CFP, dinner 1200 CFP, *bougna* 1500 CFP). The visitor information centre in Hienghène (p329) takes bookings at least three days in advance.

Koul-noué Camping (☎ 42 83 59; camping per person 400 CFP, tent hire 1000 CFP) Head 1km past Club Med to reach this camp site. The Babou Côté Océan dive club (opposite) is based here.

Camping Chez Maria (camping per tent 800 CFP) Maria's camp site is by a sandy beach on a sheltered bay, 10km north of the village.

Gîte Ka Waboana (☎ 42 47 03; d bungalows with/without kitchenette 7280/6720 CFP, extra person 1000 CFP) The colourful bungalows at this gîte

are perched on a hill opposite the marina, with views of the bay. Dishes here cost 1000 CFP.

Club Med Koulnoué Village (☎ 42 81 66; clubmed.koulnoue@offratel.nc; 1-2 person bungalows 10,300 CFP, extra person 2750 CFP, 4-person case 10,300, extra person 1800 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This Club Med establishment has comfortable and spacious bungalows with fridges and tea- and coffee-making facilities. Activities include tennis, canoeing, horse riding and biking. It serves an excellent buffet breakfast for 1500 CFP, and lunch and dinner cost 3100 CFP. The turn-off is 8.5km south of Hienghène.

Table d'hôte Julien Tobî (meals per person 2500 CFP) The table d'hôte near Grotte de Linderalique serves local food. Book a day in advance through the visitor information centre (p329).

HIENGHÈNE TO POUÉBO

There are a couple of **camp sites** (camping per tent 1000 CFP) north of the river ferry where you can simply turn up. Stock up on groceries before you go.

Relais de Ouane Batch (☎ 42 47 92; camping per tent/person 800/100 CFP, 2-/4-person bungalows 2000/2500 CFP) Run by a friendly family, 16km north of the river ferry, the unpretentious bungalows here have communal bathrooms with hot showers. There is also a table d'hôte that serves very good meals (2000 CFP); book 24 hours in advance. Activities include canoe hire (half-/full-day 600/1000 CFP) and fishing trips (10,000 CFP).

POUÉBO TO OUÉGOA

Camping d'Amoss (☎ 42 42 11; camping per tent 800 CFP) This secluded camp site is on the beachfront at the foot of Col d'Amoss. To get here, turn off the main road onto the dirt road on the right where it turns inland at Col d'Amoss.

LOYALTY ISLANDS

pop 22060 / area 1980 sq km

The sparsely populated Loyalty Islands have large tracts of impenetrable bush, secluded beaches and hidden caves. Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa each have their own characteristics: Maré is known for its deep rock holes, rugged coastal scenery and serene beaches; Lifou for its breathtaking cliff-top

views and small secret beaches; Ouvéa for its unending beach and tranquil lagoon stretching endlessly to the horizon.

The islands' inhabitants blend traditional and modern lifestyles with ease, though unless you are staying in a hotel you will need to take cash as most other places do not accept credit cards. Each island has at least one bank with an ATM that accepts most major credit cards. Seafood is a speciality in the Loyalty Islands and most accommodation places and restaurants offer lobster or crab platters. You need to order usually 24 hours in advance.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Calédonie (Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; www.air-caledonie.nc; 39 rue de Verdun) operates at least one flight a day between Noumea and each of the Loyalty Islands. A one-way/return flight costs around 11,600/23,500 CFP. For more information see p353. There are no direct flights between the Loyalty Islands.

Boat

The fast ferry *Betico* sails three times a week from Noumea to Lifou and Maré, and once a week to Ouvéa. The fare for trips from Noumea to any of the islands is 6200/12,400 CFP one way/return. Another option is the slower cargo boat *Havannah*, which also takes passengers. Travelling between the islands costs 3300 CFP. For more information see p353.

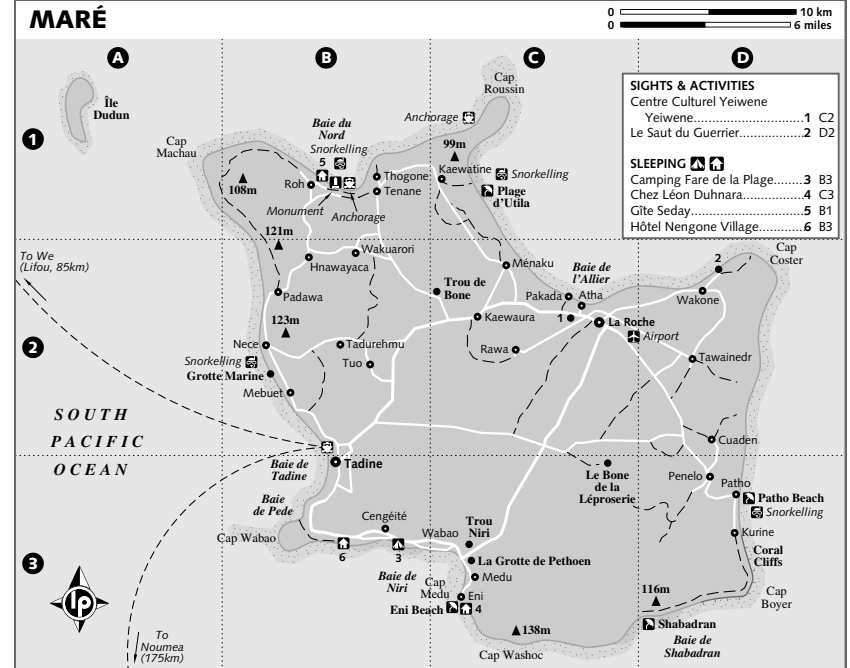
MARÉ

pop 7400 / area 641 sq km

Maré's scenic coastline is lined with stunning beaches and rugged coral cliffs. Inland, it has impressive sunken pools and a mysterious ancient rock edifice. Small wonder that some of Maré's geographical features have inspired legends.

Orientation & Information

The small coastal town of Tadiné is Maré's main centre; if you're travelling by ferry you'll arrive or leave from the wharf there. In addition to shops and a petrol station it has a **BCI bank** (☎ 45 40 62; 🕒 7.15am-noon & 1.15-4pm Mon-Fri), **gendarmerie** (☎ 45 41 17) and **post office** (☎ 45 41 05; 🕒 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri).



Tadiné & Western Maré

The main road runs beside the coast for almost the entire length of western Maré. It's a picturesque drive, taking you past beaches, cliffs, *tribus* and forests. The sights and activities that follow are listed in geographical order from south to north.

Just before you arrive in Medu there is a *trou bleu* (deep rock pool) near the road known as **La Grotte de Pethoen**, where you can see the dark shapes of eels swimming beneath an overhanging rock wall. Ask permission from anyone in Medu to go there.

Inland from Medu there is another *trou bleu* known as **Le Bone de la Léproserie**; there was once a leper hospital nearby which explains the name. This enormous hole in the limestone rock, hidden by thick vegetation, drops vertically to a pool of still water. It's considered one of the largest drowned cavities in the world. To get there, turn right at the roundabout on the road from Medu to La Roche. There is a signposted turn-off not far along this road, and the *trou bleu* is 1.5km down a dirt track beside some solar panels.

The southwest coast has several gorgeous **beaches** where you can swim or snorkel during the day and watch the glorious sunsets in the evening. The small beach at Eni is the southernmost beach, and between July and September you may even spot humpbacked whales from here. Further north at Cengité and Wabao there's a fabulous beach beside a small enclosed lagoon whose water is an exquisite turquoise.

Heading north from Cengité, stop at the long white beach at Hôtel Nengone Village (p335) or continue along the main road to la plage de Pede, a sheltered beach protected by the headland at Cap Wabao. A path to the beach leads through a gate from the main road at the sharp bend where it joins the coast.

If you are after a spot of exercise, you can follow the pleasant 6km **coastal walk** that links the beach at Hôtel Nengone Village with that at Pede. It is mostly flat and shady as the path follows the shoreline through the trees just above the beach. The path starts at the northern end of the hotel grounds. Near Cap Wabao, it veers inland and meanders

through a forest beneath a small cliff. Turn left at the end of the cliff and follow the wide path straight ahead through a wooded paddock to Baie de Pede.

About 3km south of Tadine a large **rock pool** sunk in the cliffs provides a natural aquarium where you can watch fish and sometimes turtles swimming in the translucent water. It is only a few metres inland from the sea and is linked to it by an underground channel. It is signposted by a parking area beside the main road.

The FLNKS leader Yeiwene Yeiwene, who was assassinated with Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1989, is buried at Tadine. His **grave** sits facing the sea beside the road about 2km south of Tadine. Ask permission before approaching.

About 3km off the La Roche–Tadine road, on the road to Thogone, is **Trou de Bone**, a deep rock cavity which drops to a lush tropical garden and a pool. It's on the right-hand side of the road as you're heading to Thogone, about 1.5km from the turn-off. It isn't signposted so look out for a metal guardrail beside the road. There is no security railing around the *trou* so be careful as you explore here. Yell out to let off some steam and hear your echo.

La Roche & Eastern Maré

Paths lead through the forest to the coast in the northeast of Maré; you can inquire about them at the various *tribus*. Maré's southeastern coastline is rugged and windswept. The following sights and activities are listed from north to south.

The **Centre Culturel Yeiwene Yeiwene** (☎ 45 44 79; ☎ 7.30–11.30am & 1–4pm Mon–Fri), about 2km out of La Roche on the road to Tadine, is rather empty. Of more interest, mainly because of their mysterious nature, are the **stone ruins** behind the cultural centre. Known as the Hnaenedr wall, this ancient rock fortification dates back to AD 250. The origins of the people who built the wall and what its purpose is are not entirely clear.

A huge limestone rock covered in vegetation near the coast gives the surrounding area of **La Roche** (the Rock) its name. The rock, known locally as Titi, rises above an attractive Catholic church with a red steeple. You can climb to the top of the rock with a local guide. Make inquiries in the *tribu*.

Nine kilometres east of La Roche and 2km north of Wakone is **Le Saut du Guerrier** (Warrior's Leap). It is a gap in the cliffs, 5m wide and 30m above the pounding surf, which has given rise to a legend that tells of how a warrior once escaped his enemies by leaping across the abyss.

Shabadran is an isolated, sheltered spot at the very south of Maré surrounded by cliffs and forest. The curved sandy beach here is cut off from the sea by a reef where waves crash and send foaming water cascading over coral terraces into a small sparkling lagoon. Shabadran's beauty is enhanced by the effort of getting there as it can only be reached on foot and it's a two-hour walk: take plenty of water, wear sturdy footwear and don't forget your picnic lunch. You must go with a **guide** (☎ 45 05 96; per person 2000 CFP), whom you will find in Kurine, the last *tribu* before the end of the road. Book in advance. You need to be relatively fit to do this walk.

Tours

The hotel and gîtes (see below) organise tours of the island for around 2000 CFP per person.

Sleeping & Eating

There are only a handful of places that offer accommodation and meals on Maré. All places to stay also serve meals to nonguests but you must book in advance.

Camping Fare de la Plage (☎ 45 42 24; camping per tent 1100 CFP, case per person 1100 CFP) On idyllic Wabao beach, there is a *case* behind the restaurant and campers can pitch their tent anywhere near the restaurant. The restaurant is in a large open *faré* but meals (from 1200 CFP) are often served at tables under the trees on the beach. You can arrange to hire canoes (per hour 300 CFP) and airport/wharf transfers cost 1000/600 CFP.

Gîte Seday (☎ 45 02 25; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) The welcoming gîte in the quiet *tribu* of Roh sits in a coconut grove by the rocky coast. The owners refer to the simple thatch and concrete bungalows as *cases*; these sleep between four and six people on mattresses. The charming honeymoon bungalow is built on a rock in the water. There is no beach, but you can sunbathe or admire the ocean view from a large wooden platform on the rocks above

THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

Chez Léon Duhnara (☎ 45 43 70; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This family homestay sits tranquilly in well-kept grounds under a coconut grove at Eni. It has a couple of *cases* and lots of space for camping, and is across the road from the rocky shoreline of Baie de Niri where the family runs a *nakamal* (kava house; shells 100 CFP). Guests can relax here with a shell or two of kava at sunset. Eni beach is just a short, pleasant stroll away through the picturesque *tribu*. During the school holidays the family's daughters entertain guests with dances before dinner, which is served in an attractive *faré*. The restaurant serves beautifully presented seafood meals (meals 1500 CFP, more expensive for nonguests). Guests can hire bikes or the homestay's car (6000 CFP per day). Airport/wharf return transfers are 2000/1500 CFP.

the water and swim or snorkel beneath the rocks. The restaurant, in a *faré* by the water, serves excellent meals that are usually based around fish accompanied by home-grown vegetables (meals 1500 CFP). The owner of the gîte is a sculptor, who shares his skills with visitors, and other activities include fishing and walks (free for guests; nonguests pay 500 CFP per person). Airport or wharf return transfers are 2000 CFP.

Hôtel Nengone Village (☎ 45 45 00; nengone@canl.nc; bungalows 9500 CFP; ☎ ☎) This comfortable two-star hotel at Cengéité is Maré's top accommodation option, with attractive square bungalows along the waterfront and in the garden. The hotel sits above a beautiful white-sand beach but is often very windy. There is a small pool and free kayaks for guests. Meals are available (breakfast 1300 CFP, dishes 1900 CFP, set menu 2750 CFP) and airport/wharf return transfers cost 2200/550 CFP.

Getting There & Around

Air Calédonie (☎ main office 45 42 77, airport 45 55 10; Tuoi; ☎ 8–11am & 2–5pm Mon–Fri) has an office in Tuoi on the main road between La Roche and Tadine. For information on getting to Maré from Noumea, see p332.

The easiest way to get around Maré is by car since there is no public transport. You can try biking around Maré if you are fit but the inland roads are long, straight and monotonous. Some places to stay rent bikes (1000 CFP per day) to guests. Hire companies:

Hôtel Nengone Village (☎ 45 45 00; scooters per half-/full-day 2500/4000 CFP, bikes per half-/full-day 600/1000 CFP) Based in Cengéité; rents scooters and bicycles.

Jema Location (☎ 45 44 06; per day 5760 CFP)

Maré Île de Beauté (☎ 45 43 75; per day 6500 CFP)

You can also try hitching. Drivers stop readily but depending on where you want to go it could be a long wait.

All places to stay offer island tours (around 2000 CFP) and airport or wharf transfers.

LIFOU

pop 10,320 / area 1207 sq km

Lifou is home to magnificent cliff-top views, sheltered bays where coral teeming with colourful tropical fish grows, secluded beaches, fascinating caves and a rich traditional culture.

Orientation & Information

The main centre in Lifou is We, which is also where the Loyalty Island provincial offices are based. We is a pleasant town which stretches for about 2km along the main road beside Baie de Châteaubriand. Aside from people-watching or relaxing on the white beach at the northern end of town, there is not much for visitors to do. The town has several shops and the wharf where the *Betico* and *Havannah* dock.

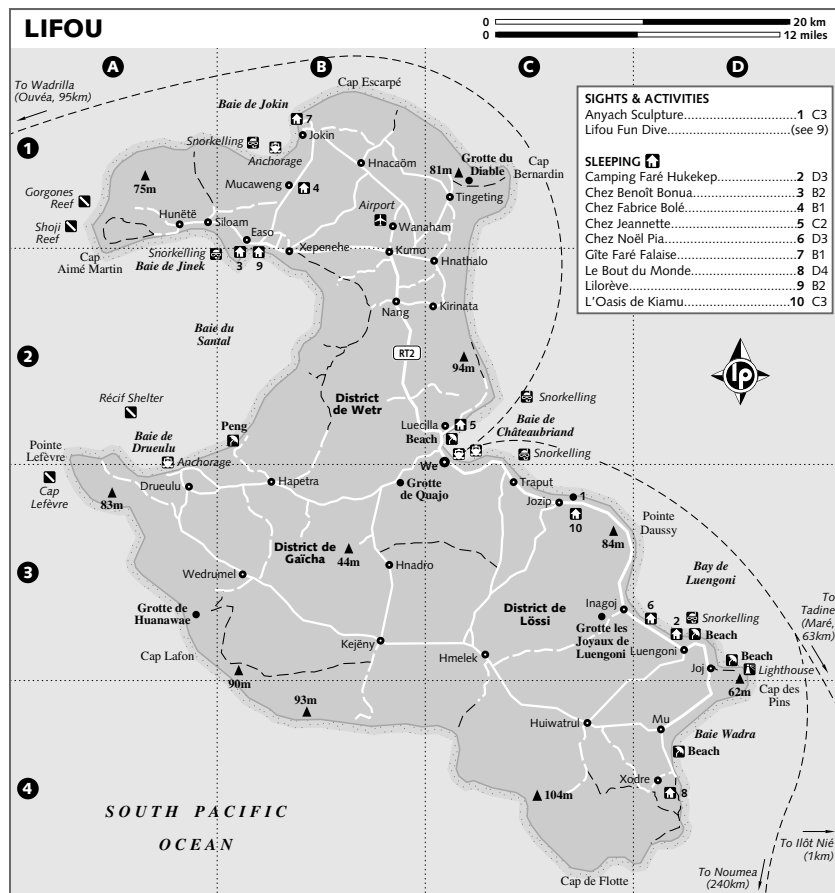
BCI bank (☎ 45 13 32; ☎ 7.20am–noon & 1–3.45pm Mon–Fri) On the main road opposite the Air Calédonie office. BCI has an ATM (DAB).

Cyber@ (☎ 45 09 04; Internet per 30 min 210 CFP; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 1–7pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–noon & 2.30–5.30pm Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) A cyber café on the main road opposite the Loyalty Island provincial offices.

Marina (☎ 45 10 62; dae@loyalty.nc; ☎ 6am–6pm Mon–Fri) Customs and immigration clearance, at the south end of We.

Post office (☎ 45 11 00; ☎ 7.45am–3pm Mon–Fri) Behind the provincial headquarters.

Visitor information centre (☎ 45 00 32; cemaïd@lagoon.nc; ☎ 7.30–11.30am & 12.30–4.30pm Mon–Fri) CEMAID, the small visitor information centre next to the *mairie*, hands out informative island maps and brochures. It has a desk at the airport that's open at each arrival.



Sights & Activities

NORTHERN LIFOU

Jokin, Lifou's northernmost *tribu*, sits on the cliff tops overlooking a vast bay. The cliffs are behind the church at the end of the road, with brilliant sunset views; the footpath around to the left of the church leads to a cove where you can snorkel among the coral formations. Between the church and the cliffs is a large attractive *case*. Ask permission before taking photos.

The road from Jokin to Easo winds through a cool green forest past Mucaweng, a *tribu* known for its **vanilla plantations**. One vanilla grower, Félix Bolé, shows visitors around his plantation for a small fee. Visitors can sample vanilla tea or coffee at the end of

the tour. The farm is down the track next to the white water tower in Mucaweng.

Lifou Fun Dive (☎ 45 02 75; www.lifoufundive.com; 2-dive package 12,900 CFP), based at Easo, organises dive trips. The club also offers night dives (7500 CFP), full-day sailing trips (10,000 CFP per person) and whale-watching excursions between July and September (10,000 CFP per person). Lifou's dive sites have an abundance of soft corals, gorgonians and tropical fish.

At the large white cross at Easo, a sealed road turns off the main road onto the Easo peninsula, ending 2km further on at a parking area beneath the small **Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes**. Steps lead up the hill to the chapel, topped by a statue of the Virgin

Mary, from where there are fantastic views of Baie de Jinek to the west and Baie du Santal to the east and south. The chapel was built in 1898 to commemorate the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1858.

About 200m before the chapel a road heads off to **Baie de Jinek**, where steps from a wooden platform built above sharp coral rocks lead down to the water. It's a great place for snorkelling, as the bay's clear water teems with small tropical fish.

Northeast of the airport, near *tribu* de Tingeting, you can visit **Grotte du Diable** (Devil's Cave). To get there, turn right after the church in Tingeting and follow the signposts to the house of **Adrien Trohmae** (☎ 45 17 93; tour per adult/child 800/400 CFP, filming 500 CFP), who runs guided tours.

Three kilometres southeast of the airport is **Hnathalo**, home of the chief of We, one of Lifou's three districts. Behind the chief's massive modern house, which is near the church, there's a *grande case* surrounded by a wooden palisade. Ask permission before entering the chief's compound or taking photos.

SOUTHERN LIFOU

There is a blissful and secluded beach at **Peng** on Baie du Santal. It's down a dirt road, 3.5km off the We–Drueulu road; the turn-off is at Hapetra. The *tribu* at Hapetra was once based at Peng but the inhabitants moved away in 1925 when leprosy broke out.

Drueulu is the home of the chief of Gaïcha district. The *grande case*, surrounded by a wooden palisade, sits at the western end of the *tribu* by the beach. You can visit the *case* but must ask permission before entering the grounds.

On the east coast, at Jozip, you can visit a sculptor's workshop where Dick Ukewed and his wife Jacqueline, Lifou's first woman sculptor, run **Anyach Sculpture** (☎ 45 14 79; ☎ 7-11am & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat & Sun).

Just before Luengoni beach there are some limestone caves known as **Grotte les Joyaux de Luengoni** (the Jewels of Luengoni). There are caves both above and below ground here; the underground caves have beautiful deep rock pools which shimmer emerald green when you shine a torch on the water. **Noël Pia** (☎ 45 03 09) runs guided tours (1000 CFP).

At Luengoni a stretch of fine white sand borders a stunning lagoon. Locals boast that it is New Caledonia's most beautiful beach. The sheltered bay is a renowned turtle haunt and it is quite common to see the creatures' heads above water as they surface for air.

Tours

Someltrans (☎ 45 14 78; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; tours per person 2500 CFP) runs half-day tours that take in either the northern or southern parts of the island; it is also possible to tour the entire island by prior arrangement. The company runs return transfers from gîtes and hotels, to Luengoni or Peng beaches (2000 CFP).

Sleeping & Eating

In *cases* guests usually sleep on mattresses on the floor – these are usually just as comfortable as a good bed. You'll find grocery shops with limited supplies in each village.

WE

Chez Jeannette (☎ 83 81 54; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, paillote 3500 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) Jeannette runs a homestay in Lucilla, a *tribu* at the northern end of We. Her place is next to the beach at the northern end of Baie de Châteaubriand. Its thatched *paillotes* (straw huts) have beds and sleep two. The homestay only caters for house guests (meals 1500 CFP). To get there, follow the unsealed road in front of the *tribu* along the waterfront. Airport/wharf return transfers are 2000/1000 CFP.

Hôtel Drehu Village (☎ 45 02 70; drehuvil@canl.nc; We; d bungalows 9880 CFP; ☎ ☎) This two-star hotel fronting onto Châteaubriand beach is Lifou's top-end accommodation option, with comfortable bungalows set in the garden and along the beachfront. The restaurant opens onto a pleasant pool area where you can also dine under a *faré* (breakfast 1300 CFP, dishes 1800 to 2400 CFP). Activities include free canoeing and kayaking for guests, as well as bike hire (per half-day 600 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers are 1950/700 CFP.

Snack Makanu (☎ 77 76 87; We; dishes 500-1000 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) This eatery is at one end of the Korail Alimentation store car park north of the roundabout. It offers a good choice of dishes and light snacks, and has a small veranda area with tables.

Restaurant Madinina (☎ 45 01 88; We; dishes 1300 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This relaxed waterfront restaurant serves generous helpings of West Indian food. You can also eat on the veranda overlooking Baie de Châteaubriand.

NORTHERN LIFOU

Gîte Faré Falaise (☎ 45 02 01; camping 1500 CFP, r/case per person 1500 CFP, d bungalows 5000 CFP) Perched on the very edge of the cliffs at Jokin, Faré Falaise has magnificent sunsets and one of the best views on the island. The rustic but charming bungalows have wooden decks looking over the bay, and they have private bathrooms. Guests can also stay in rooms in the family house or in a *case*, and a set menu is available for 1800 CFP. Activities offered here include bike hire (per half-/full-day 500/1000 CFP), boat trips (per day 1900 CFP) and island tours (3500 CFP). For swimming and snorkelling, access to the sea is via steps near the gîte. The gîte accepts credit cards. Airport/wharf return transfers cost 1600/2000 CFP.

Chez Fabrice Bolé (☎ 45 07 69; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This homestay in Mucaweng is in a vanilla plantation, beside the winding forest road south of Jokin. Guests can sample homemade vanilla jams for breakfast (500 CFP, set menu 1700 CFP) and tour the plantation where they can see the interesting pollination process.

Lilorève (☎ 45 14 23; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, bungalows s/d 3500/4000 CFP) Lilorève sits on a grassy property sloping down to Baie du Santal, with a wide view over the bay and a private sandy cove which is underwater at high tide. There are attractive thatched

bungalows with mattresses on the floor and a sparkling-clean shower block. A set menu is available for 1800 CFP. Activities include bike hire (500/1000 CFP per half-/full-day). It is near the junction of the Mucaweng road, just before the Lifou Fun Dive club.

Chez Benoît Bonua (☎ 45 90 08; camping per tent 1000 CFP, paillette/case per person 1500 CFP) By the jetty on the road to the Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes, this place has a sandy beach, a shady camp site and basic *paillettes*. Meals are 800 CFP. Activities include kayak hire (500/1500 CFP per hour/half-day) and bike hire (per day 1000 CFP).

SOUTHERN LIFOU

The following places are listed heading south from We.

L'Oasis de Kiamu (☎ 45 15 00; www.oasis-de-kiamu.com; dm/d 2000/7900 CFP; ☞) This midrange hotel at Jozip is set in a quiet garden beneath a cliff across the road from a sandy cove. There is a small pool and rooms have fridges. A set menu is 2400 CFP. Airport/wharf return transfers are 2200/1200 CFP.

Chez Noël Pia (☎ 45 03 09; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) Noël's place is by a small coral headland at one end of magnificent Luengoni beach. In the morning turtles swim around the coral rocks behind the camp site. Noël arranges reputable snorkelling excursions to the nearby reefs (1000 CFP) and guided trips to the Joyaux de Luengoni caves. Meals are available for 1000 CFP.

Camping Faré Huakep (☎ 45 14 34; camping per tent 1000 CFP, paillette s/d 3000/3500 CFP) At the southern end of Luengoni beach, this peaceful place is the only accommodation option south of We

that is away from the main road. The *paillettes* have both beds and mattresses. Meals cost from 1000 CFP. To get there, turn left down a sealed road opposite a monument with a cross. Airport/wharf return transfers per car load cost 3000/2000 CFP.

Getting There & Around

Air Calédonie (☎ airport 45 55 20, main office 45 55 50; We; ☞ 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.30am Sat) has a desk at the airport which opens for flights, and a main office on the main road in We. For information on getting to Lifou from Noumea see p332.

The best way to get around the island is by car, although short bike excursions can be enjoyable. Some places to stay rent bikes (500 to 1000 CFP per half-day, 1000 to 1500 CFP per full day) but unless you are extremely fit, the island is too big to tour entirely by bike. Hitchhiking is another option as drivers stop readily, although there is very little traffic on some roads. The following car-rental companies usually drop off or pick up vehicles at the airport or wharf at no extra cost.

Aéro Location (☎ 45 04 94; per day from 6500 CFP)

Loca V (☎ 45 07 77; per day from 5500 CFP)

Some places to stay offer island tours; make inquiries when you get there. Otherwise, book yourself on a tour with Someltrans (see p337).

OUVÉA

pop 4360 / area 132 sq km

Ouvéa is a long, thin sliver of land with a 25km-long perfect white beach and an exquisite lagoon stretching as far as the eye can see. This magnificent lagoon is surrounded by a chain of tiny islets known as the Pléiades.

Orientation & Information

Ouvéa's main administrative centres are Wadrilla and Fayaoué in the middle of the island. However, the facilities in these villages are so spread out that nowhere on the island can really be described as a centre. There's a clinic near the airport.

BCI bank (☎ 45 71 31; Wadrilla; ☞ 7.20am-noon Mon-Fri, 1-3pm Wed)

Gendarmerie (☎ 45 71 17; Fayaoué)

Post office (☎ 45 71 00; Fayaoué; ☞ 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

NORTHERN OUVÉA

The **Grotte de Kong Houlop** cave is in the bush near the airport at Houlop, set in a cliff wall. From behind the airport runway, you can drive or walk along a rough track to the bottom of the cliff where the cave is found. **Chez Jedyjah** (☎ 45 90 95, 86 59 36; per person 1100 CFP) takes guided tours to the cave and provides interesting commentary on local legends, history and flora.

The large white **memorial** by the road in Wadrilla is a tribute to 19 Kanaks who died in 1988 during the hostage crisis which arose over a political disagreement between the pro-independence movement and the French government. The 19 Ouvéans died when French military personnel stormed a cave to free French *gendarmes* being held hostage; four *gendarmes* had been killed when the Kanaks took the hostages. Tragically, it was also on Ouvéa that Kanak pro-independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene were killed by an angry Ouvéan in 1989 as they were taking part in a memorial ceremony. Their killer believed that they had ceded too much to France.

The deep **Trou Bleu d'Anawa** is sunk in the coral rock about 3km north of the island's wharf, and is connected to the sea underground. You can see fish and turtles in the blue water, and you can jump in yourself but the only way out is to pull yourself up the pool's steep sides with the help of a rope. The pool is behind a house near the road where it curves sharply away from the coast. Ask permission at the house.

A few metres south of the *gendarmerie* in Fayaoué, the sailing club **Canio** (☎ 45 71 01; ☞ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Sat) rents out equipment including windsurfers (2000/3500 CFP per one/two hours), hobby cats (3000/3500 CFP per one/two hours) and kayaks (1000/1750 CFP per one/two hours).

SOUTHERN OUVÉA

A long, narrow bay stretches inland at **Lékiny** (also spelt Lékine), and two small channels at its southern end let in water from the open sea. The cliffs rise above the bay to the east, and at low tide you can wade across to them to climb a wooden ladder to a cave where worn stalactites hang from the roof. Coral grows abundantly in this part of the

THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

Le Bout du Monde (☎ 45 02 46; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; camping per tent/person 1000/200 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This delightful place is perched on the edge of the low coral cliffs at Xodre. It is at the very south of Lifou, and with its view stretching across the endless ocean is aptly named 'the back of beyond'. Anémone, who manages the place, is a bubbly person who makes you feel at home in no time.

Le Bout du Monde has a *case* and *paillette* under a coconut grove behind a stone wall. In front of its small thatched restaurant the cliffs have been terraced smooth so diners can eat outdoors while looking out for turtles in the waves below. The house speciality is coconut crab and seafood, which you must order a day in advance (dishes from 1800 CFP). Beside the restaurant, steps lead down to a small beach sheltered by the cliffs. Activities include a full-day tour of the *tribu* (5500 CFP) which involves a custom ceremony, a *bougna* preparation demonstration and a visit to a cave. One-way airport/wharf transfers cost 2500/1500 CFP.

ÎLE DES PINS

pop 1900 / area 152 sq km

A tranquil paradise of turquoise bays, white-sand beaches and tropical vegetation, Île des Pins is also a haunting place where dark caves lie hidden in the forest and the bush invades the crumbling ruins of a convict prison. The Kuniés, as the island's inhabitants are known, have kept alive the tradition of sailing *pirogues* (outrigger canoes), and you'll see these ancient craft gliding elegantly across the calm lagoon.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Vao, on the southern end of the island, is the main administrative centre and it's where the bank, post office and the small visitor information centre are located. There are hotels and gîtes scattered around the island but the main tourist area is Kuto. The Île des Pins visitor information centre in Noumea (see p311) can book accommodation, car rental and activities.

BCI bank (☎ 46 10 45; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-3.30 Mon & Fri, 8am-noon Tue & Wed, 1-3pm Thur) In Vao, opposite the red-roofed market and 100m from the church. There's an ATM inside the building.

Gendarmerie (☎ 46 11 17) On the peninsula near the wharf in Kuto.

Post office (☎ 46 11 00; ☎ 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri) Île des Pins' only post office is in Vao. It also has a public telephone; there are others at the airport and wharf.

Visitor information centre (☎ 46 10 27; www.ile-des-pins.com; ☎ 8-11.30am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) The Point d'Information is opposite the red-roofed market in Vao. There is an information desk (☎ 46 14 00) at the airport which opens for flights.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Do not climb the taboo rock in Baie de Kanuméra (Le Rocher). This is the large vegetation-covered rock with wooden stairs up the side that is separated from the beach at high tide. It is OK to swim around it or sit on the sand beneath it.

TRANSPORT

With regular flights and ferry sailings, Île des Pins is easily accessible from Noumea. On the island itself there are several transport options to choose from, including bicycles and scooters.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Calédonie (✈ airport 44 88 46, Kuto 44 88 50; ☎ 7.30-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.30am Sat) flies to Île des Pins from Noumea at least twice daily. One-way/return flights cost around 8150/16,350 CFP.

BOAT

The *Betico* sails to Île des Pins from Noumea three times a week, docking at the wharf in beautiful Baie de Kuto. The one-way/return fare is around 4700/9400 CFP; day trips are 8200 CFP. For more information, see p353.

GETTING AROUND

The hotel or gîte where you are staying should be able to arrange airport or wharf transfers. Some of them also hire scooters and cars, and can arrange island tours (around 1700 CFP per person).

Hôtel Kou-Bugny and Gîte Nataiwatch hire scooters (3200/4700 CFP per half-/full-day). Along with Hôtel Kodjeue, they also hire cars (7000 CFP per day Monday to Friday, 8500 CFP Saturday and Sunday). Rates are generally cheaper if you are a guest at the hotel or gîte. Rates include airport and wharf drop-offs and pick-ups, as well as petrol. Relais Le Kuberka hires cars to guests only.

NC-First (☎ 46 10 90; fax 46 10 91; per day from 7280 CFP) is a car-hire company in Kuto. **Kunié Loca Fun** (☎ 43 54 80; Kuto; per half-/full-day 5000/7000 CFP) hires scooter cars (tiny two-person vehicles). You must be over 16 to drive them but a driver's licence is not necessary.

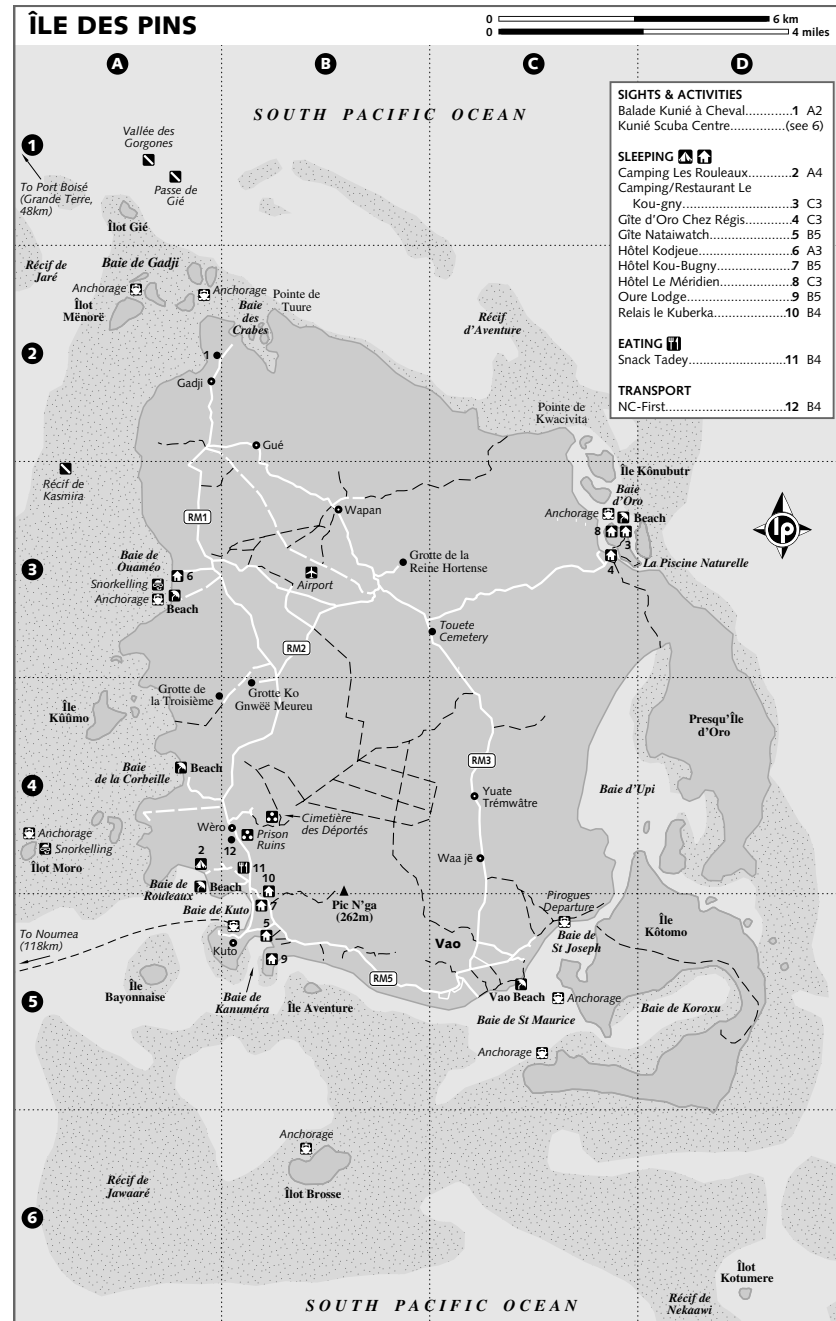
Cycling is another great way to explore Île des Pins since there aren't too many steep climbs and distances between places are relatively short. Gîte Nataiwatch rents bikes (1000/1500 CFP per half-/full-day).

Taxi Île des Pins (☎ 79 19 26) runs a taxi service but to be on the safe side you have to book well in advance.

VAO

Île des Pins' main village, Vao, is a serene place with several interesting sights and activities in the town and the surrounding area.

The attractive 19th-century **Catholic church** dominates Vao. It was established by the Marist priest Father Goujon, who managed to convert most of the island's population



in just over 30 years following his arrival in 1848. There are beautiful carvings around the altar and wooden panelling in the ceiling. A path behind the church leads up the hill to a small chapel from where you can admire the view over the village to the lagoon.

The **Statue de St Maurice** at Baie de St Maurice, about 600m from the church, commemorates the arrival of the first missionaries on the island and is also a war memorial. It's a great photo opportunity, especially as you don't need permission to photograph the site, a circle of wooden totem poles guarding a statue of Christ, just above the beach. To get there, heading west from the church, take the first left and head straight down to the sea.

Baie de St Joseph, 2km east of Vao, is so well known for its *pirogues* that it is also referred to as Baie des Pirogues. Early morning, when the *pirogues* are out on the water, is the best time to visit. Later in the day you can watch sailors building their *pirogues* on the beach under the coconut palms. A trip on one of these crafts is a must if you're visiting Île des Pins. For more information, see the boxed text, below.

KUTO

Kuto is 6km west of Vao, with two gorgeous beaches and aquamarine bays. Not surprisingly, there are several hotels and gîtes here.

About 1km north of Baie de Kuto, beside the main road, are the crumbling, overgrown ruins of an old **convict prison** built in the late 19th century. Île des Pins was initially used as a place of exile for convicts, including

Paris Communards and Algerian deportees in the 1870s. The deportees' cemetery is nearby.000

Baie de Kuto and Baie de Kanuméra are separated by the narrow neck of Kuto peninsula. It's tough to pick a favourite between the two picturesque bays. **Baie de Kuto** is the perfect place to lie on the beach or swim in the calm sea. Leafy trees grow to the edge of the beach so even on the hottest of days you'll be guaranteed some shade. For snorkelling go to **Baie de Kanuméra**, where coral grows not far from the shore.

If you are feeling energetic you can climb **Pic N'ga** (262m), the island's highest point. It is a steady 45-minute climb and the path is mostly exposed so it is best to do the walk in the early morning or late afternoon. From the summit there are fantastic views over the entire island and its turquoise bays. The signposted path to the summit begins from the main road 200m south of Relais Le Kuberka.

NORTH OF KUTO

Heading north from Kuto, the main road travels through open areas and small patches of forest. A couple of roads lead down to beaches.

About 8km north of Kuto a signposted turn-off leads down a dirt track and through a forest to the sunken **Grotte de la Troisième**. From the main road it's about 800m to the cave. The track continues but you will know where to stop when you come to a clearing where cars can turn around. The cave is down a path, 30m from the dirt track. You can climb a few metres down into the

cave's wide opening, from where you can peer into its depth. If you have a torch and a sense of adventure, venture further down the steep, sometimes slippery, floor of the cave to the bottom, which is filled with fresh water. Experienced divers can venture even further into the underground caves.

Kunié Scuba Centre (☎ 46 11 22; kuniescuba@canl.nc; 2-dive package 12,480 CFP, boat day trip per person 8000 CFP), based at Hôtel Kodjeue at Baie de Ouaméo, organises dives to the caves, along with other dive trips and boat excursions. There is a wide choice of dive sites off the northern tip of the island at Gadji, especially Vallée des Gorgones, where divers can see soft and hard corals and a profusion of sea life, including eagle rays and leopard sharks. Boat excursions include snorkelling gear and a picnic lunch. Fishing trips can also be arranged for 8000 CFP per person.

Also at Gadji, **Balade Kunié à Cheval** (☎ 49 93 07; per hr/half-day 2500/6000 CFP) organises horse treks along the beach, through the forest or up to the plateau. Turn down a dirt road at the 'ranch' signpost on the road to Gadji.

NORTH OF VAO

North of Vao the road climbs gradually towards the central plateau, where you have views over the dense forests of the east coast to the sea.

Northeast lies beautiful **Baie d'Oro**, a secluded bay on the eastern side of Île des Pins. The bay has a beautiful, long white-sand beach, enclosed on one side by a reef and on the other by tall araucaria pines reaching towards the sky. The area is best known for **la piscine naturelle**, a natural pool with exquisite turquoise water, sheltered behind the reef. The pool is not on the bay itself but is part of a narrow waterway leading from the open sea to Baie d'Oro. You can follow the sandy waterway east to the pool from the Hôtel le Méridien, and at high tide wade through the knee-deep water or follow a path on the bank. Another waterway leads north back to the beach at Baie d'Oro, coming out near Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny. Baie d'Oro is 5km from the main road; the turn-off is 9km north of Vao opposite a small cemetery.

Just north of the airport road turning is **Grotte de la Reine Hortense** (admission 200 CFP), an impressive cave which tunnels into a limestone cliff. A path leads through a

beautiful wild tropical garden to the wide entrance where stalactites hang from the roof. This cave was where Queen Hortense, wife of a local chief, is believed to have taken refuge for several months during intertribal conflict in 1855. At the back of the cave there's a smooth rock ledge where she slept. The friendly lady who maintains the cave and its surroundings can inform you about the history of the cave and the island in general.

The cave's earth floor can be slippery. There are usually a few torches available at the entrance but the batteries are sometimes flat. To be on the safe side take your own torch with you. The sealed road down to the cave is signposted.

TOURS

Most hotels and gîtes organise tours and excursions on the island and out on the lagoon.

SLEEPING & EATING

Île des Pins' *escargots* (snails) are a local speciality and most places serve them. Seafood, in particular lobster, is another popular dish; prices vary from 2500 to 5000 CFP. All restaurants attached to gîtes or hotels accept nonguests but you must book in advance and in some cases order in advance too. Restaurants can also prepare sandwiches if you'd like a picnic lunch.

Vao

Snack Le Kohu (☎ 46 10 23; dishes from 900 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) This small eatery serves snacks and meals including chicken or steak and chips, sandwiches (from 300 CFP) and a dish of the day (1250 CFP). It's by the main road heading north from Vao and is a pleasant place to stop for lunch, with tables under thatched shelters.

The **market** (☎ 6-11am), selling local produce, is held on Wednesdays and Saturdays. It is opposite the visitor information centre 100m south of the church.

Kuto

Oure Lodge (☎ 43 13 15; ourelodge@lagoon.nc; garden/lagoon/beach bungalows 27,000/33,000/39,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) At the sheltered eastern end of Baie de Kanuméra, the bungalows at this lovely hotel have a minibar, phone and Internet

PIROGUE EXCURSION

Its idyllic scenery aside, Île des Pins' most famous attraction is its wooden *pirogues* with their triangular sails. It is possible to do a round trip out on the lagoon but the most popular excursion is to Baie d'Oro. *Pirogues* leave from Baie de St Joseph at around 8am, transporting passengers to the northern end of Baie d'Upi where a path leads through a dense forest to **la piscine naturelle** (a beautiful natural pool) in Baie d'Oro (see opposite). You can laze on the sand around the pool or snorkel in its clear waters. Take a picnic lunch (most hotels and gîtes can prepare one for you) or tuck into one of the legendary *bougnas* at nearby Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis (see p346). Other lunch options close to the pool are the highly commended seafood dishes at Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny (p346) and the range of dishes served at the luxurious Hôtel le Méridien (p347).

Most of the hotels and gîtes can organise *pirogue* excursions including transfers to Baie de St Joseph and from Baie d'Oro (around 3800 CFP). If you are doing an excursion independently (1500 CFP per person), simply turn up at Baie de St Joseph before 8am and arrange a pick-up from Baie d'Oro.

THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny (☎ 46 10 65, 83 59 21; camping per tent 1200 CFP) This charmingly rustic camp site/restaurant has an excellent reputation for both its setting and lobster meals (3900 CFP, set menu 2200 CFP). Tables spread with seafood are set under the trees on the beach overlooking a dreamy lagoon. If you're camping here, don't leave your belongings unattended; they make easy pickings as, other than at lunchtimes, the place is usually deserted.

Le Kou-gny is along the beach from Hôtel Le Méridien but you have to walk through the forest to get there as a small cliff juts into the water separating the two places. From the Hôtel Le Méridien bridge, follow the path to the right through the forest; it's a five-minute walk. You can also walk there from *la piscine naturelle*, by following the causeway closest to the coast then walking along the beach. Le Kou-gny does not arrange transport for guests.

connection. Near the beach there is a peaceful swimming pool area in front of a large airy dining room (à la carte mains 2100 to 4500 CFP). A great place to get away from it all.

Hôtel Kou-Bugny (☎ 46 18 00; www.kou-bugny.com; standard/deluxe bungalows 16,500/19,500 CFP; 🍷) Kou-Bugny is on the opposite side of the quiet road from divine Kuto beach. The main hotel building and traditionally inspired bungalows sit under the spreading branches of trees overlooking a small pool. The restaurant here serves excellent seafood (dishes 1800 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers are 1700/400 CFP.

Camping Les Rouleaux (☎ 46 11 16; camping per person 1000 CFP) This large, shady and peaceful camp site fronts onto the sandy beach at Baie des Rouleaux. Unlike Île des Pins' other calm bays this one has waves, and in July and August it's a popular spot for board riders and kite surfers. The camp site is 1km from the main road. Heading north, the turn-off is just before Snack Tadey; immediately after that, you take the right fork.

Relais Le Kuberka (☎ 46 11 18; camp site 1600 CFP, s/d 6200/6700 CFP) This quiet place with a small pool is 350m from the beach. Rooms are set around a small tidy garden and have fridges and private bathrooms. The restaurant serves excellent meals (dishes 2000 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers 1300/400 CFP.

Gîte Nataiwatch (☎ 46 11 13; www.nataiwatch.com; camping per tent 1800 CFP, modern/traditional bungalows 7500/8000 CFP, per extra person 500 CFP) Nataiwatch is a simple and relaxed gîte set in a wooded area about 100m from the beach, towards the eastern end of Baie de Kanuméra. The modern concrete bungalows have bathrooms, and the traditional ones have kitchens but share a toilet and

shower block with the camp site. Meals cost 1600 CFP. Bike hire (1000/1500 CFP per half-/full-day) and return transfers from the airport/wharf (1200/ 400 CFP) are available.

Snack Tadey (☎ 46 10 68; dishes 1100 CFP; 🍷 8am-5pm) This tiny place at the northern end of Baie de Kuto serves sandwiches and meals. Its opening hours are erratic but if it's closed go round the back and if someone's there they'll open up. Attached is a small shop with a limited selection of groceries.

North of Kuto

Hôtel Kodjeue (☎ 46 11 42; resa@kodjeue.nc; 4-3/-5pm) On the calm waterfront of Baie de Ouaméo, this place has wonderful sunsets. The bungalows are clean and comfortable but are set on a wide lawn and have little privacy. The four-person bungalows have decks built out over the beach as well as a TV and fridge, and the five-person bungalows have a kitchenette. The hotel has a small grocery store (open from 7.30am to noon and from 4pm to 6.30pm), and meals are available for 1800 CFP. Airport or wharf return transfers cost 600 CFP.

Baie d'Oro

BUDGET

Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis (☎ 43 45 55; www.gitedoro-ile-despins.com; camping per tent 1500 CFP, d bungalows 8150 CFP) Chez Régis offers accommodation in a shady camp site or bungalows which are tastefully decorated using local materials. Overlooking one of the waterways leading to *la piscine naturelle* is the open-thatched restaurant that's famous for its *bougnas* (chicken/lobster 2500/4000 CFP); order your *bougnas* a day in advance. If you arrive

at around 10am, you can watch the ladies preparing them; they take them out of the earth oven at around noon. Airport/wharf transfers cost 1200/1600 CFP.

TOP END

Hôtel Le Méridien (☎ 46 15 15; meridienidp@meridien.nc; deluxe r 55,000 CFP, deluxe ste 65,000 CFP, premium bungalows 75,000 CFP; 🍷) This hotel is pure tropical luxury. Idyllically set in a forest growing down to the beach, it has views across Baie d'Oro to araucarias silhouetted against the sky on the surrounding islets. An optical illusion would have you believe the swimming pool flows into the lagoon, as if you could float from one to the other. Breakfast for two and return transfers to the airport are included in the rates. Lunch/dinner costs 4500/5000 CFP. There's a supplementary 1000 CFP tax on the rates.

SHOPPING

Boutique Créations Île des Pins (☎ 46 12 68; 🕒 9-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) Near the wharf in Kuto, this shop sells Île des Pins souvenirs including coffee-table books (in English), postcards, and hand-painted tops and *pareos* (sarongs). A DVD (3950 CFP) featuring underwater and island scenes on Île des Pins is also on sale. Several of the books on the island were written by the boutique's owner, Hilary Roots.

PREPARING A BOUGNA

The main Melanesian dish in New Caledonia is *bougna*, served on special occasions such as traditional festivals, weddings or when welcoming visitors. It is a mixture of yam, sweet potato, taro, other vegetables and meat, fish or seafood, covered in coconut milk and tightly wrapped in banana leaves. The parcels are arranged on hot stones in an earth oven and covered with more hot stones. Green leaves are placed on top of the stones to keep in the heat and steam the food, and the meal is left to cook for 1½ to two hours. It is served piping hot and portions are usually extremely generous.

Most Melanesian-run gîtes or homestays can prepare a *bougna* but you must order 24 hours in advance. Expect to pay from 1500 to 3000 CFP per person. Lobster *bougna* is the most expensive option.

NEW CALEDONIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Most midrange and top-end hotels and resorts are in Noumea, but there are a couple of good choices on the east coast of Grande Terre, at least one each on Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa, and a few on Île des Pins. Rates start at around 5000/8000/13,000 CFP per night for a basic/midrange/top-end hotel. You'll find that accommodation is often cheaper if you buy a package deal in your own country.

If you're on a budget there are homestays, gîtes and camp sites everywhere around the country, except in Noumea. Camp sites have toilets and showers (usually with only cold water) of varying degrees of cleanliness. Camping costs about 1000 CFP per tent and some places charge an extra 100 CFP per person.

Gîtes are very modest small hotels with bungalows (small chalets or huts) that sleep between two and six people. They usually have private bathrooms, a restaurant or a communal kitchen. Prices range from around 4000 to 9000 CFP for one or two people and 1000 CFP per extra person.

Homestays, called *accueil en tribu* or *accueil chez l'habitant* in French, are the best way to meet Kanak people. They are usually within a family compound, or set slightly apart within a *tribu*, and have *cases*, usually with mattresses, or bungalows, usually with beds. Homestays cost around 800 to 1500 CFP per person per night. Meals are extra.

The concept of farmstays is similar to that of homestays, and they are the best way for travellers to meet rural Caledonians or Broussards. They cost around 2500 CFP per person. Unless otherwise stated, prices quoted in this chapter include a 5% services tax.

ACTIVITIES

Abseiling

New Caledonia has many high waterfalls which are ideal for abseiling. **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc) runs abseiling trips to Cascade de Ciu (p326), Cascade de Bâ (p330) and Cascade de Tao (p330).

PRACTICALITIES

- *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* (www.info.nc) is the only daily newspaper. *Les Infos* is a weekly current affairs paper, *Le Chien Bleu* is a monthly satirical paper and *Mwâ Vée* is a quarterly publication addressing Kanak cultural issues.
- There's just one public television station, Télé Nouvelle-Calédonie, part of the French territories broadcasting service (RFO). All programmes are in French. Canal Satellite, a network of pay channels, has more choice. Radio Nouvelle-Calédonie (RNC) is the national radio service. Other radio stations include Radio Djiido, the pro-independence network; Radio Rythme Bleu (RRB), the loyalist Rassemblement station broadcasting a lot of party propaganda; NRJ, aimed at young people and broadcasting mainly music; and Radio Océane, a more moderate loyalist station.
- Videos are usually based on the PAL system.
- As in France, plugs have two round pins (220–240V, 50Hz AC).
- New Caledonia follows the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Diving & Snorkelling

New Caledonia has the world's second-largest reef, so there's no shortage of snorkelling sites. The best are the reefs around the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins. Bring your own equipment and watch out for strong currents. In Noumea, take a boat to the Île aux Canards, Îlot Maître or Amédée Islet (p315) marine sanctuaries.

New Caledonia has many wonderful dive sites, most of them on the outer reef and reached by boat. Dive clubs usually offer a two-dive package for 10,000 to 13,000 CFP.

Nouvelle-Calédonie Plongée (www.nouvellecaldonieplongee.com) is a dive association involving the majority of dive clubs throughout the country. It sells 'Plongée' cards which give holders a 15% discount at any of the member clubs. Cards can be purchased at all member clubs and are valid for one month (2500 CFP) or one year (5000 CFP).

Fishing

Air Mer Loisir and Pacific Charter (see below) in Noumea run fishing tours. **New Caledonia Fishing Safaris** (☎ 25 19 40; www.newcaledoniafishing safaris.nc), also based in Noumea, runs sportfishing safaris around the rest of New Caledonia.

Hiking

New Caledonia has diverse landscapes that are great for hiking, which is best done during the cooler mid-year months. Popular hiking areas and tracks around Noumea include Monts Koghis (p316), Parc Provinciale de la Rivière Bleue (p321) and the GR1 walking track (p323).

Along Grande Terre's northeast coast, many trails wind up to waterfalls or into the mountains from river valleys. **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 42 87 77) organises guided walks in the Hienghène region (see p331).

Hikers should visit the **Direction des Ressources Naturelles** (Map p318; ☎ 24 32 55; dm@province-sud.nc; 19 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) to pick up free brochures and maps (mainly in French) detailing a selection of hikes on Grande Terre.

Horse Riding

Many ranches and *tribus* on Grande Terre offer one- or multiple-day horse-riding trips into the central mountain ranges. *Tribu de Oui Poin* (p325) in La Foa, *tribu d'Atéou* (p327) in Koné and Ranch du Carré 9 (p327) in Voh all run horse treks.

Sailing & Boating

The **Cerle Nautique Calédonien** (CNC; ☎ 26 27 27; 2 rue du Capitaine Desmier, Noumea) yachting club in Noumea's Baie de l'Orphelinat is a good place to inquire about yachting and sailing. **Air Mer Loisir** (Map p318; ☎ 28 29 01; www.aml.nc; Port Moselle, Noumea) operates one-week catamaran excursions on 12m to 23m catamarans from 300,000 CFP.

Pacific Charter (Map p318; ☎ /fax 26 10 55; www.pa.nc/charter; Port Moselle, Noumea) has speedboats available for hire from 15,000 CFP per day, as well as yachts and organised sailing trips.

Raid Ngatahi (☎ /fax 77 24 40; www.raid-ngatahi.nc; Noumea) speedboat excursions to islets in the southern lagoon for 18,500 CFP per day.

Scenic Flights

Ultra-light aircraft (known as ULM) offer an exhilarating experience, particularly when flying over Coeur de Voh, north of

Koné. **ULM Blue Travel** (☎ 77 88 42; gilbulm@lagoon.nc) offers courses and introductory flights (ULM per 15/30 minutes 3000/5000 CFP, water-planes per hour 10,000 CFP).

Private helicopter flights leave from Magenta airport and fly over Noumea's bays, Amédée Islet and the other islets sprinkled over the lagoon, the barrier reef and Baie de Prony in the Far South. Operators:

Helicocean (☎ 25 39 49; helicocean.dir@mls.nc; 30 min per 3 people 27,300 CFP)

Helitourisme (☎ 26 96 62; helitourisme@mls.nc; 30 min per 3 people 32,500 CFP)

Water Sports

Wind- and kite-surfing are extremely popular on Noumea's bays. Windsurfing boards, kayaks and catamarans can be rented at Anse Vata from Plages Loisirs (p316). **Glisse Attitude** (Map p312; ☎ 78 27 69; glisseattitude@lagoon.nc; per hr/half-day 4500/9000 CFP) in Noumea organises kite-surfing trips and courses with a qualified instructor.

Surfing trips to the reef are run by Nêk-wéta (p326) in Bourail and Bouts-d'Brousse (p324) in Boulouparis.

Whale Watching

Humpback whales frequent New Caledonian waters between July and September. Whale-watching excursions are run off the Far South coast (p323) of Grande Terre and in Lifou (p336) in the Loyalty Islands.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and most private businesses are open Monday to Friday from 7.30am or 8am to 4pm or 5pm, closing between 11.30am and 1.30pm. The exceptions are the banks in Noumea and most post offices around New Caledonia, which remain open at lunchtime.

In general, shops are open weekdays from 7.30am to 11am and 2pm to 6pm, and Saturday from 8am or 9am to noon. However, some supermarkets often don't close for lunch and are open all day Saturday and Sunday morning.

Sunday is extremely quiet throughout New Caledonia.

CHILDREN

Parents will discover useful tips in Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*. Infants under three years stay at most places free. Some

places charge for a cot. For children under 12, you usually pay about half the adult rate for accommodation and activities.

Very few places have change tables for infants so it's handy to travel with a fold-out change bag. In Noumea or on Île des Pins car-hire companies can provide a safety seat. On the Loyalty Islands not all hire companies have them. If you're travelling in Noumea with children, see p316.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

In general, New Caledonia is very safe for travellers. However, St Louis, in the Mont-Dore area, has experienced violent incidents in recent years. The violence has not been aimed at tourists but it's best to keep your distance if there have been recent protests.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

French Embassies & Consulates

Australia Consulate (☎ 02-9261 5779; St-Martins Tower, 31 Market St, Sydney, NSW 2000); Embassy (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada Embassy (☎ 613-789 1795; fax 562 3735; www.ambafrance-ca.org; 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, Ont K1M 2C9)

France Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (☎ 01 43 17 53 53; www.diplomatie.gouv.fr; 37 Quai d'Orsay, 75351 Paris)

Germany Embassy (☎ 030-590 03 90 00; www.botschaft-frankreich.de; Pariser Platz 5, 10117 Berlin)

Ireland Embassy (☎ 01-277 5000; www.ambafrance-ie.org; 36 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Japan Embassy (☎ 03-5420 8800; www.ambafrance-jp.org; 11/44 Chome Minami Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8514)

Netherlands Embassy (☎ 70-312 58 00; www.ambafrance-nl.org; 1 Smidsplein, The Hague 2514 BT)

New Zealand Embassy (☎ 04-384 2555; www.ambafrance-nz.org; Rural Bank Bldg, 13th fl, 11-34/42 Manners St, Wellington)

UK Embassy (☎ 020-07 31 000; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X7JT)

USA Consulate Los Angeles (☎ 310-235 3200; www.consulfrance-losangeles.org; ste 300, 10990 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles CA 90024); Consulate New York (☎ 212-606 3600; www.consulfrance-newyork.org; 934 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10021); Embassy (☎ 202-944 6000; http://ambafrance-us.org; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Vanuatu Embassy (☎ 678 223 53; fax 678-226; Kumul Hwy, BP 60 Port Vila)

Embassies in New Caledonia

Australia (Map p318; ☎ 27 24 14; 7th fl, Immeuble Foch, 19 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea)

Indonesia (Map p312; ☎ 23 28 80; 2 rue Lamartine, Baie de l'Orphelinat, Noumea)

Japan (☎ 27 83 03; BP 2009 Noumea)

Netherlands (Map p318; ☎ 28 48 58; 1st fl, 33 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea) Above Hôtel Lapérouse.

New Zealand (Map p318; ☎ 27 25 43; 2nd fl, 4 blvd Vauban, Noumea)

Switzerland (Map p312; ☎ 26 11 59; 18 rue Jim Daly, Val Plaisance, Noumea)

UK (☎ 28 21 53; 14 rue du Générale Sarraill, Noumea)

Vanuatu (Map p318; ☎ 27 76 21; 1st fl, 53 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea) Above Hôtel San Francisco.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p829 for details of regional holidays.

Festival of the Yam (March) Kanak festival marking the beginning of the harvest.

Giant Omelette Festival (April) At Dumbéa, a dozen chefs, a huge skillet, 7000 eggs and many hands are used to make a free-for-all 3.5m-diameter omelette. It's held close to Easter at Parc Fayard.

Avocado Festival (May) Held in Nece, Maré. It's the island's biggest fair, celebrating the end of the harvest.

La Foa Film Festival (late June) A week-long film festival held in La Foa and Noumea.

Noumea Contemporary Art Biennale (July/August) Held every two years, features the work of local and international artists.

Marathon Internationale de Noumea (July/August) Held annually, attracts top athletes from as far away as Kenya and Canada.

Bastille Day (14 July) France's national day. In the evening on the 13th there are fireworks and there's a military parade in Noumea in the morning of the 14th.

Live en Août (August) Noumea's annual music festival featuring foreign and local bands.

Foire de Bourail (August/September) Big three-day country fair featuring a rodeo, cattle show, horse racing and a beauty pageant.

Équinoxe (October) Held in Noumea. Biennial festival of contemporary theatre, dance and music featuring local and international artists.

COUNTRY FAIRS & RODEOS

Country fairs are popular and colourful events enjoyed by rural folk and townies alike. As well as livestock and produce contests, there are craft and food stalls, and children's rides. The highlight is the rodeo, when stockmen compete in bulldogging or flap about like rag dolls on the backs of bucking bulls. The crowd delights in the action and also gets to see a lot of horseless (or bull-less) riders carried out of the arena on stretchers.

Fête du Bœuf (Late October/early November) A popular country fair with a rodeo in Païta.

Sound & Light Show (Late October/early November) Impressive light shows are staged at Fort Teremba, near La Foa, over a fortnight.

INTERNET ACCESS

Away from Noumea, Internet cafés are few and far between. La Foa, Koné and Lifou have at least one Internet café each. Prices vary, but it generally costs between 250 and 400 CFP to surf for 30 minutes. Connection can be slow unless ADSL is available.

Some midrange hotels in Noumea have Internet access in hotel rooms but elsewhere it's mainly restricted to top-end hotels.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Kaori (www.kaori.nc) Contains links to other New Caledonian websites, and information on news and upcoming events.

New Caledonia Online (www.kaledonie.com) A portal to numerous New Caledonian websites.

New Caledonia Tourism South (www.nctps.com) The official site (in French, English and Japanese) for New Caledonia's Southern Province.

MAPS

The main visitor information centres in Noumea have good free maps of New Caledonia and more detailed maps of specific regions.

Charts can be consulted at the CNC (see p348) or purchased at **Marine Corail** (Map p318; ☎ 27 58 48; 28 rue du Général Mangin, Noumea). The Service Hydro-graphique et Océanographique de la Marine (SHOM) produces excellent mariners' maps covering all New Caledonia's territorial waters, also available from Marine Corail.

MONEY

New Caledonia doesn't have to be expensive. Try a few money-saving tricks such as self-catering and camping. Noumea has many cheap eateries in the Chinatown area, and a lunchtime sandwich at Place des Cocotiers is cheaper than a restaurant meal.

Note that, as in France, decimals are indicated with commas (eg 1.25kg is written as 1,25kg) and thousands with points or spaces (10,000 CFP would be written as either 10.000 CFP or 10 000 CFP). For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page.

There is a 5% services tax which is usually included in displayed prices. Banks

HOW MUCH?

- **Baguette:** 80 CFP
- **Cup of coffee:** 200 CFP
- **Music CD:** 3000 CFP
- **1kg fresh tuna:** 1500 CFP
- **Cinema admission:** 950 CFP

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 130 CFP
- **1L bottled water:** 90 CFP
- **Can of Number One beer:** 100 CFP
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 1000 CFP
- **Croissant:** 100 CFP

in Noumea and some of the main centres change travellers cheques. Tipping is not compulsory.

ATMs

You'll find ATMs either outside or inside most banks. They accept most major credit cards. There are many ATMs in Noumea and also in other major towns and villages. Some post offices also have ATMs.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted by hotels, restaurants, big shops and airline offices in Noumea, but not at budget places outside the capital.

TELEPHONE

New Caledonia's international telephone code is ☎ 687.

Phoning Australia or NZ costs 60/72 CFP per minute in off-peak/peak time. To the UK, US, Canada and Japan costs 100/130 CFP. To France costs 80/96 CFP. You can also dial ☎ 19 for a cheaper call to certain destinations, including France (33 CFP per minute), Australia and NZ (38 CFP), the UK (70 CFP) and Japan (60 CFP). To make a reverse-charge call (*en PCV*) dial ☎ 1050.

Mobile Phones

Mobile-phone numbers begin with a '7', '8' or '9'. If you want to use your mobile phone in New Caledonia you need to first make sure that it is compatible with the network (GSM 900/1800). A rechargeable

Liberté phonecard costs 6136 CFP and includes 3000 CFP credit. For assistance dial ☎ 1014 free call.

Phonecards

To make a phone call you can buy either a *télécarte* (telephone card) and use a public box or an *IZI* card and use a fixed phone. *Télécartes* cost 1000 CFP (25 units), 3000 CFP (80 units) or 5000 CFP (140 units) while *IZI* cards cost 1040/3120/5200 CFP. They're both available from post offices and some tobacconists' shops in Noumea.

TIME

New Caledonia is 11 hours ahead of GMT. It's one hour ahead of Australian Eastern Standard Time (Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne) and one hour behind NZ and Fiji.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN NEW CALEDONIA

The main visitor information centres are the **Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud** (☎ 28 75 80) for Noumea and the Southern Province, **Tourisme Province Nord** (☎ 27 78 05) for the Northern Province, **Destination Île des Pins** (☎ 24 92 80) for Île des Pins and **Destination Îles Loyauté** (☎ 27 66 27) for the Loyalty Islands. See p311 for details.

VISAS

Passport holders from countries including European Union member countries, Switzerland, Australia and NZ are allowed entry into New Caledonia for three months without a visa. Some visitors, including citizens of Japan, Canada and the US, are allowed entry for one month without a visa. To check the latest visa requirements check the French government website for New Caledonia at www.etat.nc.

TRANSPORT IN NEW CALEDONIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

AIRPORTS & AIRLINES

All international flights land at Tontouta International Airport, 45km northwest of Noumea. For details on travelling between Tontouta and Noumea, see p313.

The following major airlines fly into New Caledonia. Air France flies code-share with Air Calédonie International (Aircalin).

Air France (Map p318; ☎ 25 88 88; www.airfrance.com; 41 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea)

Air New Zealand (Map p318; ☎ 28 66 77; www.airnewzealand.com; Axxess Travel, 22 rue Duquesne, Noumea)

Air Vanuatu (Map p318; ☎ 28 66 77; www.airvanuatu.com; Axxess Travel, 22 rue Duquesne, Noumea)

Aircalin (Map p318; ☎ 26 55 00; www.aircalin.com; 8 rue Frédéric Surleau, Noumea)

Qantas (Map p318; ☎ 28 65 46; www.qantas.com; 35 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) Access from rue de Verdun.

ASIA

Osaka and Tokyo are the only Asian cities directly connected with New Caledonia. Aircalin flies from Japan to New Caledonia for around US\$1000.

AUSTRALASIA

In Australia, Qantas and Aircalin flights leave from Brisbane (three flights a week) and Sydney (daily). A return excursion fare from Sydney/Brisbane starts at US\$400/350.

There are four flights per week between Auckland and Noumea, either with Air New Zealand or Aircalin. The 90-day return excursion fare starts at US\$400.

EUROPE

Qantas and Air New Zealand fly from Europe; France to New Caledonia with Qantas costs from US\$1600. Aircalin, code sharing with KLM/Air France/Cathay Pacific/Singapore Airlines, flies a more direct route via Japan for around US\$1500.

NORTH AMERICA

The main gateway to New Caledonia from North America is Los Angeles or New York via Tahiti. You can fly with Air France or Air Tahiti Nui to Tahiti (US\$1200), where you can connect with an Aircalin flight to Noumea. Air New Zealand flies via Auckland (US\$1000) or Qantas via Sydney (US\$1200).

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for New Caledonia's Tontouta international airport is included in your flight tickets.

Another option is to fly with Air Pacific from Los Angeles to Noumea via Nadi. The price is in the same range.

PACIFIC

See p837 for details of air passes that include New Caledonia.

Aircalin flies to Nadi (Fiji) once or twice a week (US\$590 return) and to Faa'a airport in Pape'ete (French Polynesia) once a week (US\$650 return).

You can fly between Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Noumea several times a week (from US\$300 return) with Aircalin or Air Vanuatu.

Twice a week, Aircalin flies to Hihifo on Wallis Island (Wallis and Futuna), with a possible connection flight to Vele on Futuna. The return fare for either is around US\$600.

SOUTH AMERICA

Use an Aircalin flight to Tahiti and connect with a LAN flight to Santiago, via Easter Island. Or fly with Qantas via Sydney. A return ticket costs around US\$1400.

Sea

BOAT

The passenger and cargo boat **Havannah** (☎ 27 04 05; cmisa@lagoon.nc; one way 10,850 CFP) sails to Port Vila, Malicolo and Santo in Vanuatu once a month.

CRUISE SHIP

All cruise ships dock at the Gare Maritime on Quai Jules Ferry in Noumea. They also drop anchor at various spots around New Caledonia where they shuttle their passengers ashore to spend a day on the beach.

Pacific Sun, Pacific Star and Pacific Princess (departing Sydney) are the most regular visitors. Ask your travel agent for more information. In Noumea, contact **CMA-CGM** (Map p318; ☎ 27 01 83; nma.scrisofoli@cma-cgm.com; 32 rue du Général Galliéni, Noumea).

YACHT

New Caledonia welcomes about a thousand yachties every year. The territory has marinas and customs and immigration clearing services for yachties in Noumea, Koumac, Hienghène and Lifou. Ahead of arrival in Noumea, use VHF Channel 67 to contact the **Capitainerie** (harbour master's office; Map p318; ☎ 27 71 97; port.moselle@sodemo.nc).

The **Cerde Nautique Calédonien** (CNC; ☎ 26 27 27; sectretariat@cnc.asso.nc; VHF Channel 68; 2 rue du Capitaine Desmier, Noumea) yacht club at Baie des Pêcheurs is a good source of information about yachting and sailing.

Cruising New Caledonia & Vanuatu, by Alan Lucas, gives details on many natural harbours and out-of-the-way anchorages. The *Cruising Guide to New Caledonia*, by Joël Marc, Ross Blackman and Marc Rambeau, is a general yachting guide that also provides an exhaustive list of possible anchorages around the islands. See p350 for information on purchasing marine charts.

GETTING AROUND

Air

AIRLINES IN NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonia's only domestic airline is **Air Calédonie** (Aircal; Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; www.air-caledonie.nc; 39 rue de Verdun, Noumea; ✈ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat), not to be confused with the international carrier Aircalin. Air Calédonie operates out of Magenta airport in Noumea and flies to Koné, Touho and Koumac on Grande Terre, to each of the Loyalty Islands and to Île des Pins. There are no direct flights between the Loyalty Islands as all inter-island flights transit in Noumea. There are Air Calédonie agencies at all flight destinations, and a **ticket office** (☎ 25 21 77) at Magenta airport.

Fares quoted below are return peak fares and include a 1050 CFP tax. Off-peak fares cost 8% to 22% less. Fares for children under 12 are half-price.

AIR PASSES

For international travellers, the Air Calédonie Pass (31,100/6650 CFP per four-flight coupon/extra coupon) offers the

opportunity to discover various destinations within the Air Calédonie domestic network, at preferential rates. This pass is sold at the Air Calédonie office in Noumea (details above under Airlines in New Caledonia).

Bicycle

You have to be pretty eager to cycle round 400km-long Grande Terre. However, each of the Loyalty Islands, in particular Ouvéa, and Île des Pins are ideal for cycling. Bikes can be transported on the *Betico* and *Havannah* ferries.

There are few bike lanes in Noumea, and drivers both in the capital and elsewhere are not necessarily courteous to cyclists, so you need to be vigilant.

Boat

The *Betico*, a fast passenger ferry, sails three times a week between Noumea, the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins. *Betico* sails from Noumea to the Loyalty islands on average twice weekly either on Monday or Tuesday and on Thursday or Friday. It sails to Île des Pins three times a week on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Tickets can be bought at the **Gare Maritime des Îles** (☎ 26 01 00; commercial.betico@mls.nc; 1 av James Cook, Noumea at the Ferry Terminal; ✈ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 6am-10am Sat) on the way to Nouville, opposite the red bingo sign on rue Jules Ferry.

A one-way economy-class ticket from Noumea to the Loyalty Islands costs 6200 CFP and to Île des Pins 4700 CFP. Going between islands costs 3300 CFP. An Île des Pins day trip costs 8200 CFP. Return fares are double. Children pay around half-price.

The *Havannah*, a slower cargo boat, is operated by **Compagnie Maritime des Îles** (☎ 27 36 73; cmisa@lagoon.nc; Ferry Terminal), which

DOMESTIC AIRFARES

From	To	Fare (CFP)	Frequency
Lifou	Maré	7600	4 per week
Lifou	Ouvéa	5350	daily
Maré	Ouvéa	10,600	5 per week
Noumea	Île des Pins	8150	daily
Noumea	Koné	11,800	4 per week
Noumea	Koumac	13,050	2 per week
Noumea	Loyalty Islands	11,550	daily
Noumea	Touho	11,800	4 per week

has an office at the dock on Quai des Caboteurs at Baie de la Moselle. *Havannah* runs on Mondays between Noumea and Maré and Lifou in the Loyalty Islands (one way 5120 CFP).

For details of boat charters, see p348.

Bus

Nearly every town on Grande Terre is connected to the capital by bus, all leaving from Noumea's old **gare routière** (bus station; Map p318; ☎ 24 90 26; 36 rue d'Austerlitz; Noumea; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1.30-4pm) next to Ciné City. It is best to book in advance, especially if you are travelling on Friday or Sunday.

Carsud (☎ 25 16 15; Gare de Montravel; rue Edouard Ungier; Noumea) operates buses between Noumea and the greater Noumea region. Buses operate roughly between 6am and 6pm and go as far north as Tontouta (400 CFP), passing through Dumbéa (320 CFP) and Païta (360 CFP), and south to Plum in Mont-Dore (400 CFP).

On the other islands there are practically no buses, aside from school buses, and it's best to prearrange transport or hitchhike.

Car, Scooter & Campervan

Touring New Caledonia by car or campervan allows you to explore places that are off the beaten track and aren't easy to reach by bus. Car-hire rates are reasonable. New Caledonia's major roads and most of its minor ones are all sealed and in good condition. Occasionally, road signs are missing so a good map is essential.

AROUND GRANDE TERRE BY BUS

The following bus fares and schedules are for services departing from Noumea.

	Fare (CFP)	Duration	Frequency
Bourail	1100	2½ hr	Mon-Sat
Canala	1100	3½ hr	daily
Hienghène	1650	6½ hr	Mon-Sat
Koné	1300	4 hr	daily
Koumac	1650	5½ hr	daily
La Foa	900	1¼ hr	Mon-Sat
Poindimié	1450	5 hr	daily
Pouébo	1850	6½ hr	Wed & Fri
Thio	1000	2 hr	daily
Yaté	600	2 hr	Mon-Sat

DRIVING LICENCE

International Driving Permits are not required to drive in New Caledonia – a valid licence from your country will suffice.

HIRE

Car-rental companies abound in Noumea and the larger ones also have desks at the airport. The visitor information centre (p311) in Noumea has a list of companies.

Most companies charge about 1200 to 2000 CFP per day (on average) for a small sedan. In addition, there's a charge of 20 to 36 CFP per kilometre. For free 150km per day or unlimited kilometres it costs between 3500 and 5000 CFP per day. Some companies offer good deals such as one-week's all-inclusive rental from 20,000 CFP, excluding petrol.

In the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins prices are much less competitive than in the capital (5000 to 8000 CFP per day with unlimited kilometres).

Car-rental companies in Noumea:

ADA (Map p318; ☎ 28 85 02; www.ada.nc; 49 rue Georges Clémenceau, Noumea)

Discount Location (Map p312; ☎ 27 26 99, 77 54 42; discountloc@lagoon.nc; 135 rte de l'Anse Vata, Noumea) Along with regular vehicles, also rents camping cars (two-/five-/seven-person vehicles per three days 45,000/55,000/60,000 CFP, 600km included). Also has an office at Tontouta airport (☎ 35 39 28).

Location Camping Remorque (☎ 46 93 42; www.camping-remorque.nc; rte de la Roche Blanche, Mont Mou; per day/Sat & Sun/Mon-Fri 4500/9500/25,000 CFP) This place in Païta rents fully equipped camping trailers. It also offers free airport transfers and helps to organise car hire.

Noumea Fun Ride (☎ 26 96 26; noumeafunride.org@canl.nc; Gare Maritime) Rents bicycles (per hour/half-day 1100/1300 CFP), scooters (per hour/half-day 2300/2700 CFP) and scooters (miniature cars; 2700/3800CFP).

Point Rouge (Map p318; ☎ 28 59 20; www.pointrouge.nc; 75 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) Also rents scooters for 1800 CFP a day.

INSURANCE

No extra insurance is required when hiring a car. Some companies charge a security deposit of 100,000 CFP.

ROAD RULES

As in France, driving in New Caledonia is on the right-hand side of the road. The maximum speed limit on a main road is 110km/h and in residential areas 50km/h. Seat belts are compulsory.

The maximum permissible blood alcohol concentration is 0.05%, and random breath testing is carried out.

Local Transport

BUS

Noumea is the only town in New Caledonia with an urban bus system (see p313).

TAXI

Taxis are confined to Noumea and the larger towns on Grande Terre. They run on a meter.

Tours

There are many tours and activities to choose from in Noumea and throughout New Caledonia. Tour operators in Noumea organise trips in and around the city as well as further afield. The visitor information centre (p311) in Noumea has details.

Arc en Ciel Voyages (Map p318; ☎ 27 19 80; www.arcenciel-voyages.nc; 59 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) A major company which covers the entire country.

Aventure Pulsion (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 48; aventure@canl.nc) Organises off-the-beaten-track tours by 4WD in the Far South (see p323).

Caledonia Tour (☎ 25 94 24; caledoniatours@lagoon.nc) Runs tours around Grande Terre (see p323).

Caltours (Map p318; ☎ 41 10 92, 81 20 01; 7 rue Charles de Verneilh, Noumea) Organises half-day tours to Monts Koghiis, full-day tours to Bourail (including a *bougna* lunch in a *tribu*) and tours to the Far South. It also offers a week-long tour of Grande Terre.

VIP Tours (☎ 43 53 08, 79 27 89; j.brighton@lagoon.nc) Run by John Brighton, specialises in tours for English-speaking people. It runs a popular day trip called the Once-upon-a-time Tour.

Outside Noumea, many places offering accommodation, especially gîtes, home-stays and farmstays, run tours such as guided walks or horse treks. These tours enable you to interact with your Kanak or Caldoche hosts and discover places that are not accessible to the general public since they are usually on private or customary land.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

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 Liliyika 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'.

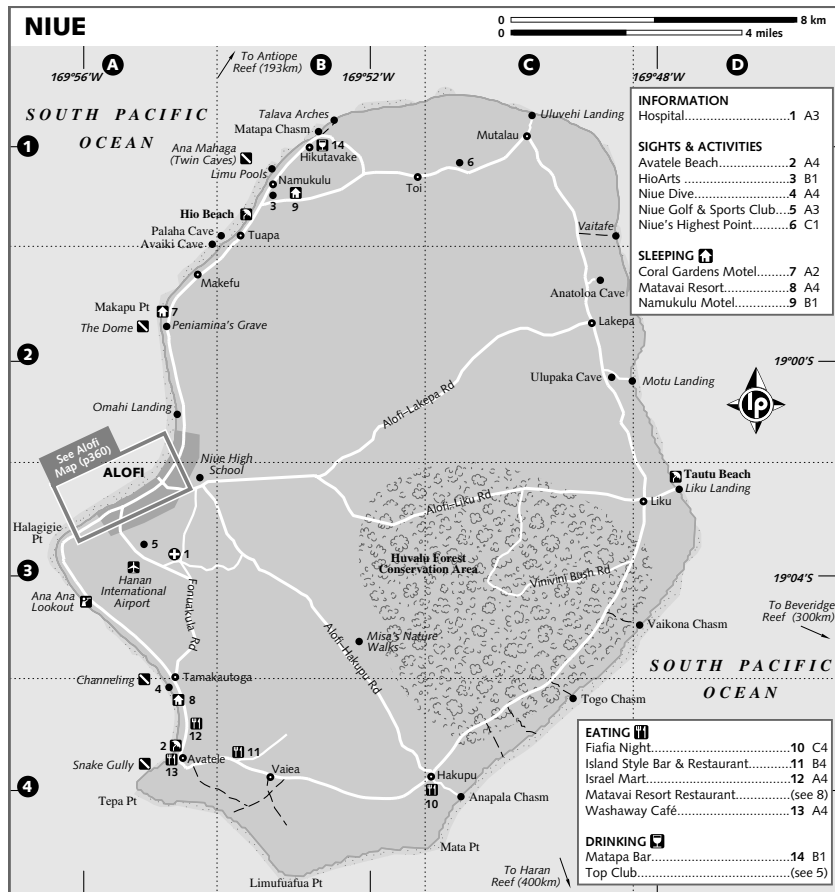
THE CULTURE National Psyche & Lifestyle

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. Vitaly, 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.

Fakaalofo atu.
Koe Kia (to one person), *Mutolu*
Kia (two or more people).
Malolo nakai a koe?
Malolo (fakaave).
Fakamolemole.
Fakaave 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.

Avaiiki Cave (7km) is named after the legendary Polynesian homelander 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 Avaiiki 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.

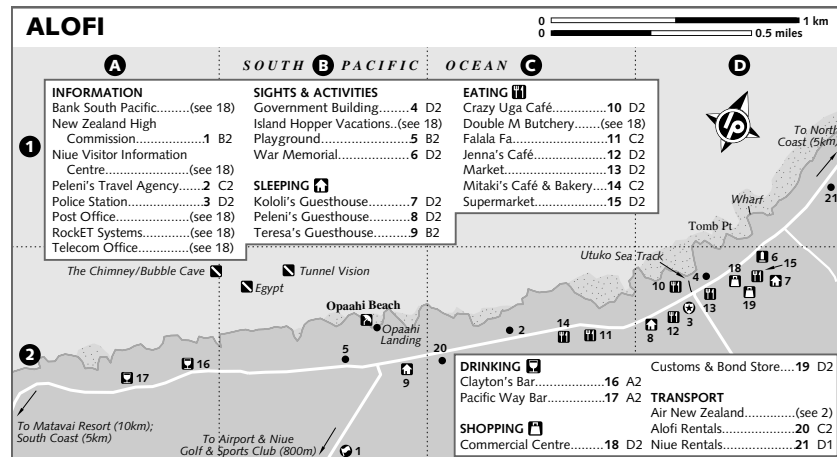
Just before **Lakepa** (24.7km) are limestone caves on private land owned by the Magatogia family. You can visit the **Anatoloa Cave** and **Ulupaka Cave** on a tour run by Tali Magatogia (see p363).

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; mapualagienote@yahoo.co.nz; adult/child NZ\$45/20) on excursions through the Anatoloa 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 \$/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; pelenisguesthouse@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; chrisipa@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 Utuko 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 specialties 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.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

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).

Northern Mariana Islands

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is currently undergoing massive change as its fiscally challenged capital Saipan painfully comes to terms with the loss of its lucrative Japanese tour market. But travel trends come and go; the charm of the islands endures. It's therefore your mission, should you accept it, to seek out the best of the CNMI.

At first glance, Saipan can seem like a package-tour nightmare, a place where Chamorro culture has devolved, tour buses constantly patrol the sights, and solitude seems hard to come by. But catch the island at the right time and at the right angle (in the right place) and you'll be rewarded with some poignant experiences: flame trees in bloom; melancholy historical sights; turquoise waters and white sands; and fine diving and snorkelling.

At some stage, you will need respite, though, and that's waiting just south of Saipan in the form of Tinian. This is a somniferous island, tiny in size but claiming a mighty chapter in world history: American B-29s flew from here to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Tinian, for the most part, has escaped major development (although it does have an ostentatious casino) and its natural charms remain intact, like lovely beaches and rewarding hikes.

But the real jewel in the CNMI chain is beautiful Rota. Actually, Rota is the Diamond Tiara of the Marianas, the crowning glory, an island punctuated by a hilly interior, small farms, good spring water, enough deer to maintain a hunting season and fiery orange sunsets that light the evening skies. And a more friendly place you'd be hard-pressed to find; by the time you've finished with Rota, your arm will be sore from waving and your heart will be sore from having to leave.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Breathe in the lush serenity of **Pona Point** (p388) in Rota
- Enjoy the tranquillity of peaceful **Tinian** (p382)
- Reflect on one of WWII's most tragic tales at **Banzai Cliff** (p378) in Saipan
- Commune with nature at the teeming **bird sanctuary** (p389) in Rota
- Get deep and wet (if you're an experienced diver) at the famous **Grotto** (p378) in Saipan



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The rainy season is from July to October, when rainfall averages about 300mm a month; from December to May the monthly rainfall average is only around 100mm.

According to *The Guinness Book of Records*, Saipan has the world's most equable temperature, averaging 27°C year-round.

NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and Island):** Garapan (Saipan)
- **Population:** 80,362
- **Land area:** 477 sq km
- **International telephone code:** 1-670
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** English, Chamorro
- **Greeting:** *Hafa adai*
- **Website:** www.mymarianas.com

Like Guam, the CNMI lies directly along the typhoon track, with typhoons most commonly occurring from August to December. In 2004 the CNMI suffered three major typhoons: Typhoon Chaba and Typhoon Songda in August, and Typhoon Sarika in September. Chaba hit Saipan, Rota and Tinian, forcing over 1000 residents from their homes to evacuation centres. Damage was estimated at US\$18 million and the Northern Marianas were declared an official disaster zone. Songda and Sarika were less widespread: both hit the small islands of Pagan, Alamagan and Agrihan, north of Saipan. See p61 for more on typhoons.

HISTORY Reduction

The ancient Chamorro inhabited the Mariana islands (Guam, Saipan, Rota and Tinian) at least as early as 1500 BC, probably migrating from Indonesia (they shared Southeast Asian language and customs).

When Ferdinand Magellan came upon the Marianas in 1521, he called them *Islas de los Ladrones* (Islands of Thieves); they were renamed *Las Marianas* in 1668.

In the 1690s the Spanish, initiating their 'reduction' policy, swept down through the Marianas, rounded up the Chamorros and brought them to Guam to forcibly convert them to Christianity. On Rota several hundred Rotanese managed to hide in the hills and avoid capture, which is why some of the people of Rota today represent the purest Chamorro blood in the Marianas.

Around 1820 the Spanish allowed islanders from the western Carolines to move to

the larger Mariana islands. The Carolinians managed Spanish cattle herds and maintained a presence on the Marianas at a time when Spain was skittish over German intentions in the area.

Germany bought the Northern Marianas from Spain in 1899 as part of its Micronesia package deal, their primary interest here being copra production.

Destruction

When the Japanese took the Northern Marianas from Germany at the beginning of WWI, there were fewer than 4000 Chamorros and Carolinians on the islands.

The Japanese had little interest in copra but had great expectations for sugar cane. They chopped down groves of coconut trees and cleared tropical forests and jungles to create level farmland. When *latte* stones (p225) from ancient villages got in the way, they were cast aside.

By the mid-1930s sugar operations in the Marianas were providing the Japanese with more than 60% of all revenues generated in Micronesia.

At the outbreak of WWII there were over 45,000 Japanese and immigrant workers in the Northern Marianas – more than 10 times the number of Micronesians.

Expulsion

On 15 June 1944 the US launched Operation Forager, one of the war's largest military operations: an invasion force of 127,000 soldiers, 600 ships and 2000 planes attacked first Saipan and then Guam, with pre-invasion bombing attacks including the first-ever wartime use of napalm. The Japanese had 31,000 soldiers waiting; resistance was fierce but by evening the US had 20,000 men ashore.

Garapan, the Japanese administrative centre, fell on 3 July. When the battle for Saipan was declared over on 9 July, 3500 Americans, 30,000 Japanese defenders and 400 Saipanese were dead.

After the fall of Saipan, Americans made their first beach landing on Tinian's north-west shore on 24 July 1944, securing the island after nine days of heavy combat and the loss of 400 American and over 5000 Japanese lives. US troops immediately began extending the Japanese airbase on Tinian and used it to stage air raids on Japan, in-

cluding the atomic bomb drops on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

US invasion forces bypassed Rota.

Reconstruction

The fierce fighting reduced whole towns to rubble; in the years following, the US administered the islands by providing hand-outs rather than encouraging economic development.

In 1948 the CIA closed off half of Saipan to islanders and outsiders alike and used the northern part for covert military manoeuvres; the Northern Marianas were finally opened to visitors in 1962.

In 1961 Saipan and Rota petitioned the US government, asking to become integrated with Guam. The requests were made nearly every year until 1969, when Guam voters were allowed to vote in a referendum on the issue and rejected the idea. One reason cited for the rejection was that many Guamanians still harboured ill feelings towards those Saipanese who had acted as interpreters during Guam's occupation by the Japanese.

In June 1975 the people of the Northern Marianas voted to become a US commonwealth, and in doing so became the first district to withdraw from the Trust Territory.

Since the commonwealth covenant took effect, the US has provided hundreds of millions of dollars for capital development, government operations and other programs in the Northern Marianas. Today, however, there's a growing concern that the Marianas were pushed into becoming a US commonwealth, with standards of education just one of the things that were left by the wayside in favour of rapid tourist development.

In the past several years, a number of garment factories have closed on Saipan, leaving a large group of foreign workers unemployed (perhaps as many as 15,000) and forcing a rise in prostitution, according to government sources.

That's the tip of an economic meltdown that is threatening the CNMI's immediate future. The garment industry, for example, has traditionally been Saipan's strongest, but in 2005 it made US\$5 million less than gambling revenue; poker machines are in every village on Saipan and bring with them the full gamut of social problems, including increased crime.

JAL TURNS TO JELLY

There's no better indicator of the Northern Mariana Islands' economic woes than Japan Air Lines' termination of its Saipan services. Although JAL has been in the Saipan game for over 30 years, flying 50% of passengers travelling to the island from Japan, it withdrew for good in October 2005. They're not the first major Japanese player to get out: Japanese owners sold various hotels, resorts and golf courses in 2004, with most of these investors citing Saipan's growing prostitution racket as a deterrent (especially as it's centred in Garapan's hotel strip, where most Japanese tourists stay). Others say that the government policy of allowing foreigners to enter for work purposes without doing background checks also contributes to an unsafe environment. Ultimately, Japanese tourists no longer see Saipan as a safe destination and have voted with their wallets, and that goes to the heart of the JAL pullout. CNMI officials are naturally aghast at the decision – they estimate it will cost the government US\$80 million a year in lost revenue.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Life on Saipan, for many locals, has revolved around Japanese tourism for so long that it's hard to imagine any other way. The people remain friendly and optimistic, but there's an underlying uncertainty as jobs and hollow markets shake local confidence. Rota, meanwhile, maintains its reputation as the friendliest of the Mariana islands, even after the CNMI Senate recently cut US\$1.2 million from its budget. This prompted Rota's mayor, Benjamin T Manglona, to hint that 'there is always a temptation to join Guam', which in turn caused a Tinian senator to wish for Rota's immediate secession and therefore more money for Tinian.

Lifestyle

The local Chamorro culture is a hybrid of native and Spanish colonial influences. In Saipan especially, there's a powerful overlay of popular American trends, and perhaps even more so than Guam, there's hardly any indigenous culture left to speak of. As on Guam, most cultural activities centre on the Catholic church, especially among the Chamorro population and Filipino immigrants. There are also followers of the Baptist, Methodist, Mormon, Korean Presbyterian, Evangelical and Seventh-Day Adventist churches.

There is some Carolinian culture going down, although it has been mainly integrated with Chamorro, forming a hybrid known as Chamolinian.

Population

Saipan is home to approximately 90% of the CNMI's population, while Tinian and Rota have 5% each. Around half of the total

population is resident foreigners, mostly from the Philippines, China and Korea. Of the native population, roughly 75% is Chamorro; the remainder are Carolinian.

ARTS

The annual Flame Tree Arts Festival (p391) is the region's biggest celebration of local artistic culture.

The Carolinian Stick Dance, a foot-stomping, percussion-driven dance, is said to be a local tradition, although the only time you're likely to see it performed is at the Flame Tree festival or at the Chamolinian Cultural Village (p377).

Cinema

Given the Marianas' war history, it's no surprise that a few films have attempted to record that period.

Josef von Sternberg's *The Saga of Anatahan* (1954), set on the now-volcanic northern Mariana island of Anatahan, is a peculiar little film that purports to tell a true tale of shipwrecked Japanese soldiers during WWII who don't believe the war is over until years later; meanwhile they terrorise a local woman. The film is narrated in English, yet the actors speak Japanese.

John Woo's *Windtalkers* (2002) is a depiction of the Battle of Saipan with lots of ultraviolence and male bonding – and a stack of clichés.

LANGUAGE

Hafa adai is the traditional greeting, as it is in Guam, although the slang 'howzit' is nearly as common. English is the official language, while Chamorro (also spoken on Guam) and Carolinian are native tongues.

On Saipan, Japanese is spoken in many hotels and shops, at least in Garapan.

Chamorro Basics

Hello.	<i>Hafa adai.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>
How are you?	<i>Hafa tatamanu?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Maolek.</i>
Please.	<i>Pot fa bot.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Si Yu'os ma'ase'.</i>
Yes.	<i>Hunggan.</i>
No.	<i>Ahe'.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The CNMI is made up of 14 of the 15 islands in the Marianas archipelago. This archipelago curves 645km northward from Guam, the chain's southernmost island, dividing the Pacific Ocean and the Philippine Sea.

Geography

All the islands are high types of either volcanic or limestone formation. Except for Aguijan, which is just south of Tinian, the smaller Mariana islands run north of Saipan. The highest point in all of Micronesia is in the Marianas – 964m on the remote island of Agrihan.

In April 1990 all 21 residents of the island of Anatahan were evacuated to Saipan following an earthquake that measured 7.4 on the Richter scale and signs that a volcanic eruption was imminent.

Anatahan has remained uninhabited ever since, just as well considering the

island witnessed its first historical volcanic eruption in 2003. There have been several eruptions since, the most recent being in 2005, when some people on Saipan and Rota were reported to have taken sick as a result of volcanic haze and ash.

Wildlife

After WWII Saipan was so deforested that *tangan-tangan* plants were aerially seeded to prevent erosion. These plants now predominate the northern end of the island and have choked out native flora and upset the natural prewar ecosystem. Despite the pervasiveness of *tangan-tangan*, hibiscus, banana and coconut trees are also everywhere, as are flame trees that flower in May and June.

SAIPAN

pop 62,392 / area 122 sq km

On first appearances, Saipan seems to be in a bit of a sorry state. Its character in recent years has been aligned to the yen and the crush of Japanese tourists looking to find a cheap slice of exotica in their own backyard. As a result, a great deal of the island's indigenous charm has been overshadowed by fast-food chains and poker houses; foreign workers currently outnumber indigenous groups, and the capital, Garapan, is a flashy tourist trap, filled with massage parlours and a growing sense of unease.

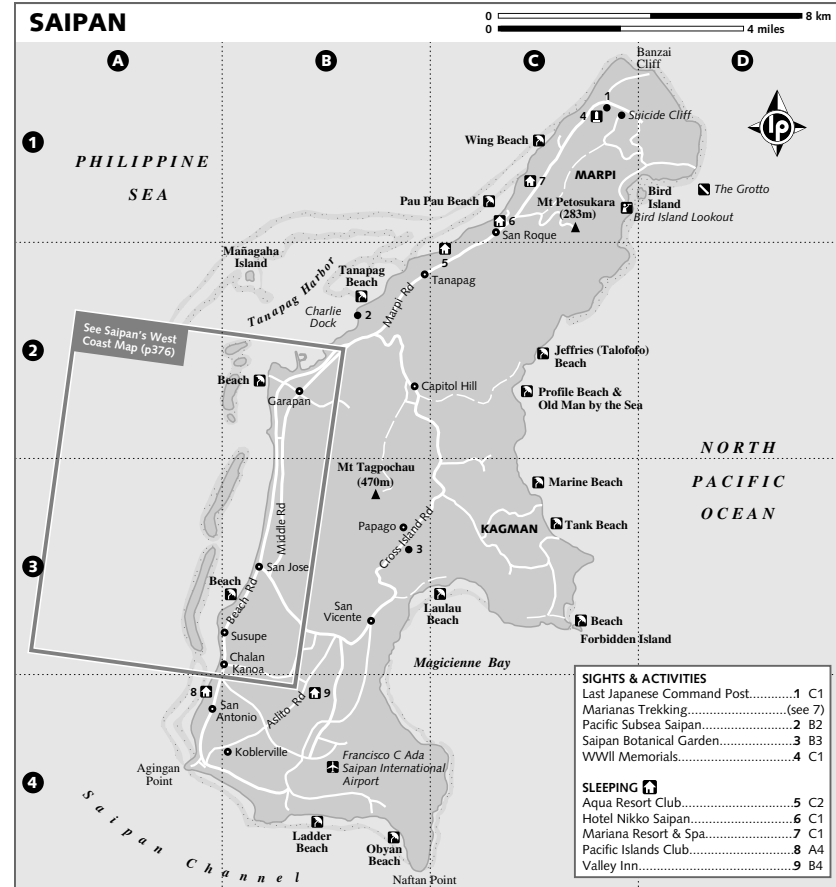
All the same, Saipan has its adherents (apparently, a local joke goes like this: Q: Why do palm trees in Saipan bend to the south? A: Because Guam creates a vacuum).

Outside Garapan, there are gentle beaches on the western and southern coasts, a rugged and rocky eastern coast, a hilly interior and dramatic cliffs to the north.

Finally, despite everything that's been done to their culture (invasion, occupation, appalling economic policies), the people remain welcoming – and tolerant, for the most part.

ORIENTATION

The airport is at the island's southern end. See p374 for more on getting to/from the airport. Most major hotels and services are on Beach Rd, which runs along the west



coast. Note that Middle Rd is formally known as Chalan Pale Arnold Rd.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Computer World (Map p376; ☎ 233 3321; Garapan; per hr US\$4)

EZ Rider (Map p376; ☎ 233 8191; Garapan; per hr US\$4)

Joeten-Kiyu Public Library (Map p376; ☎ 235 7322; Garapan) Free access.

Media

Saipan Tribune (www.saipantribune.com) Daily newspaper.

Medical Services

Commonwealth Health Center (Map p376; ☎ 234 8950; Middle Rd, Garapan)

Money

There are abundant ATMs.

Bank of Guam (Map p376; ☎ 233 5000; Garapan)

Bank of Hawaii (Map p376; ☎ 236 8450; Garapan)

Post

Main post office (Map p376; Chalan Kanoa)

Tourist Information

Marianas visitor information centre (Map p376;

☎ 664 3200; www.mymarianas.com; Beach Rd;

☎ 8am-5pm)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Saipan has experienced a rash of burglaries, robberies and purse snatchings in recent times. Take the usual precautions:

THE SAIPAN INCIDENT

Poor Saipan just can't take a trick. In 2002 it was chosen as the training ground for the Republic of Ireland's World Cup football squad; it was a public-relations disaster. Ireland captain Roy Keane, disgusted at the quality of the grounds and facilities – including lumpy, barren pitches – let fly with a vicious verbal spray at Ireland manager Mick McCarthy and was subsequently sent home. Keane missed the World Cup, ensuring the 'Saipan Incident' was broadcast all over Europe. Yes, Saipan had made the headlines...but for entirely the wrong reasons.

THE NORTHERN MARIANAS IN...

Two Days

Spend the first two days in Saipan. The northern tip of the island is home to some of Saipan's more rewarding sights, including **Pau Pau** (p377) and **Wing** (p377) beaches, which offer good snorkelling. Also up north, **Banzai Cliff** (p378), **Suicide Cliff** (p378) and the **Last Japanese Command Post** (p378) offer up disturbing war histories, yet also provide some scenic reflection with fine views. If you're a confident diver, you won't want to miss the **Grotto** (p378), one of Micronesia's famous dive sites. In the afternoon wander around Garapan if you dare, taking in **Micro Beach** (opposite), **American Memorial Park** (opposite) and **Sugar King Park** (opposite). Later, dine at a Garapan **restaurant** (p382).

The next day, avoid package tourists by checking out the rugged east coast, including **Profile** (p379) and **Laulau** (p379) beaches. Drive up to scenic **Mt Tagpochau** (p379) in Saipan's interior for scenic views, before finishing off with a stroll or jog down the **Beach Pathway** (p380) on the west coast.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then hop over to Tinian for the next couple of days, exploring the historic **North Field** (p385) and its atomic bomb loading pits, the village of **San Jose** (p383) and its ancient *latte* stones, plus **Kammer Beach** (p383) and **Taga Beach Park** (p384), with their pleasant snorkelling and fine turquoise waters.

One Week

Follow the four-day itinerary, then spend the rest of the week in Rota, taking it real easy in a very relaxed and peaceful environment. There's great sightseeing if you need it, including lush **Pona Point** (p388); the historic **Taga Taga Stone Quarry** (p388), with its collection of untouched, half-finished *latte* stones; plus a seductive **bird sanctuary** (p389), where you might find yourself tweeting, cocking your beak and shaking your tail feather with the boobies and the terns.

don't openly count money and don't leave valuables in cars.

Western Garapan's numerous massage parlours generate numerous brazen touts who won't take no for an answer, so take special care when walking around the hotel district at night. Recently, surveillance cameras were installed in the area although their effectiveness has been undercut by technical problems (official sources whined that the cameras were 'switching from colour to black and white and sometimes just shining brightly', making identification difficult).

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR

See p392 for details of international flights to Saipan.

Freedom Air (☎ Saipan 234 8328, 288 5882, Rota 532 3800, Tinian 433 3288; www.freedom-air.net) Daily flights from Saipan to Rota (one way/return adult US\$80/150, child US\$72/135); Saipan to Tinian (one way/return adult

US\$32/64, child US\$27/54); Tinian to Rota (one way/return adult US\$85/161, child US\$74/144).

Pacific Island Aviation (☎ Saipan 234 3601, Rota 532 0420, Tinian 433 3600)

BOAT

A **ferry** (☎ 328 2233) goes between Charlie Dock and Tinian (US\$15; from Tinian Wednesday to Friday, Sunday and Monday 8am and 1pm, Tuesday and Saturday 1am, 8am and 1pm; from Saipan Wednesday to Friday, Sunday and Monday 9.30am and 5pm, Tuesday and Saturday 3.30am, 9.30am, and 5pm).

Getting Around

You'll need a car for best results – there's no public transport.

EZ Rider (☎ 233 8191) rents bicycles for US\$12/18 (six/24 hours).

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels provide airport transport for their guests, though some charge a fee; check before arrival.

CAR

Most car-hire companies will deliver your car anywhere on the island; prices start at around US\$50. Most of the following agencies have booths at the airport:

Budget (☎ 234 8232)

Dollar (☎ 288 5151)

Hertz (☎ 234 8336)

Islander (☎ 234 8233)

Thrifty (☎ 234 8356)

SHUTTLE BUS

All services run approximately from 10am to 10pm; call for exact schedules.

Gray Line Island Shuttle (☎ 234 7148) Hotel-to-shopping-centre shuttle offering a half-/full-day pass (US\$5/10).

Sugar King (☎ 322 8778) US\$3 a ride.

TAXI

It costs around US\$25 to get from the airport to Garapan and Micro Beach, US\$40 from the airport to San Roque and US\$15 from Garapan to Susupe. Taxis are clearly marked and usually easy to find at the airport and around larger hotels.

GARAPAN

pop 4279

The Japanese developed Garapan, their administrative centre in the Marianas, into one of Micronesia's most bustling towns. Its streets were lined with neat rows of houses and its central area looked like a little Tokyo, with public baths, sake shops, Shinto shrines and Japanese schools and office buildings.

Garapan was completely levelled by US bombers during WWII and it wasn't until the 1960s that the Saipanese began to resettle the area.

These days, you'd be forgiven for wondering if Japan was ever kicked out: the majority of tourist brochures are in Japanese, as is much of the signage, and the language is often heard in shops and hotels. Some see the injection of yen into the economy as a form of 'war reparation', therefore excusing the rampant development that has transformed Saipan over the last few decades.

Micro Beach

Saipan's most attractive white-sand beach (Map p376) is travel poster material, with brilliant turquoise waters, a good view of

Mañagaha Island and a fine angle for catching Saipan's lingering sunsets. It's also popular with windsurfers. Water deep enough for swimming is a little way out but the wade is pleasant enough (except for a few squishy sea cucumbers) as the bottom is sandy.

Micro Beach is a culturally significant site to Saipan's Carolinian community – its Carolinians first landed here upon resettling in the 1800s.

American Memorial Park

This 53-hectare park (Map p376) stretches north along the coast from the Hyatt hotel, encompassing the north end of Micro Beach and the Smiling Cove harbour area. To the east the park extends all the way to Middle Rd and takes in a swamp forest that serves as an important **bird habitat**.

The park has beachside picnic grounds, restrooms and a popular ironwood-shaded jogging path that runs 2.4km up the coast.

Along Beach Rd there are two **large memorials** honouring Americans who died in the US invasions of Saipan and Tinian.

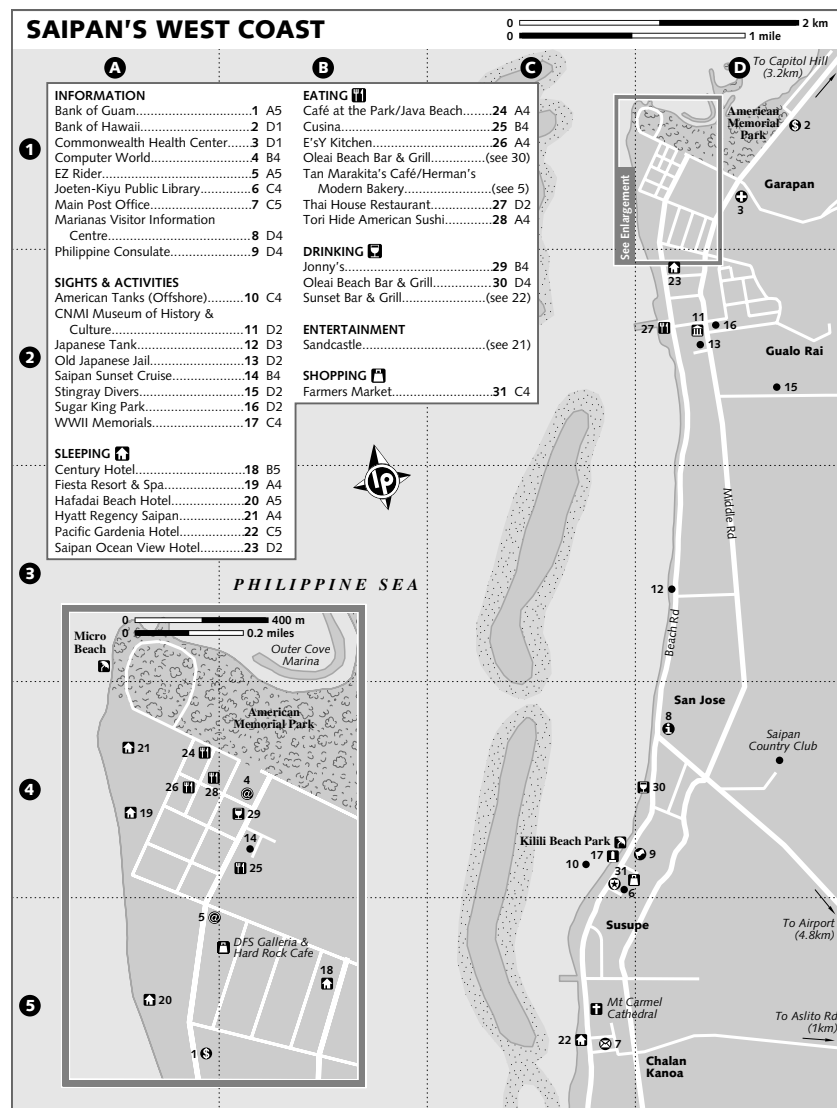
Sugar King Park

This park (Map p376) is a hotchpotch of historical and memorial sights; a **bright red railroad engine** on a roadside grassy knoll makes the park easy to spot. The steam-powered engine was once used to haul

SUNKEN TREASURE

In 1638 the Manila galleon *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* went down in rough gales east of Agingan Point, scattering its rich treasure along the shallow reef that now borders the Coral Ocean Point Resort Club golf course.

In 1987, after searching archives in Seville, Mexico City and Manila to research the location and cargo, an international crew of 30, including historians and archaeologists, began a two-year salvage operation. Some 10,000 dives later they had recovered scores of cannonballs and ballast stones, 1300 pieces of gold jewellery, many inlaid with precious gems, and 156 storage jars, some still filled with fragrant resins. Some of the pieces were recovered in as little as 60cm of water.



sugar cane from fields in the Marpi area to a factory in Chalan Kanoa where Mt Carmel Cathedral now stands. The route follows the present-day Middle Rd, although none of the train tracks remain.

The rear section of the park is called the **Commonwealth Botanical Garden**. While it's not as extensive as the title might imply,

there are some nice old trees and flowering bushes that make for pleasant strolling.

At the far end of the park, a red, riverless bridge leads to a **Japanese shrine** called the Katori Jinja. Originally built in 1911, it was destroyed in 1944 and rebuilt in concrete in 1985. Steps behind the shrine lead to a 15-minute loop trail that climbs around the

back of the hill, stopping along the way at a **hexagonal prayer temple** dedicated to WWII Japanese soldiers.

CNMI Museum of History & Culture

The ruins of the old Japanese hospital have been converted into this small, though interesting, **museum** (Map p376; ☎ 664 2160; www2.cnimuseum.org; Middle Rd, Garapan; adult/child US\$3/free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat). The museum has pottery, illustrations and models from Saipan's history. There's also a fascinating collection of trinkets recovered from the 17th-century wreckage of the Spanish galleon *Concepción* (see the boxed text, p375), including gold and pottery.

Old Japanese Jail

This old jail (Map p376) stands largely intact and makes for an interesting sight – walk down the corridor past the damp concrete cells, some of which still have barred steel doors attached. The main cell-block row was for male civilian prisoners; geishas who stole from their customers' pockets and women who didn't complete their employment contracts were held in a smaller building. There's a rumour that US aviator Amelia Earhart, who disappeared during her round-the-world flight in 1937, was shot down by the Japanese and held here before being executed as a spy.

Chamolinian Cultural Village

The village is a recent initiative aimed at promoting Chamolinian (Chamorro and Carolinian) arts and traditions. Seven coconut huts feature local products and indigenous performances. Contact the visitor information centre (p373) for further details.

MAÑAGAHA ISLAND

Just over 2km northwest of Micro Beach, uninhabited Mañagaha (Map p373) is an old patch reef that geological forces lifted above sea level some 10,000 years ago. It's now covered with a fringing white-sand beach and has Saipan's best snorkelling. The clear waters surrounding the island have lots of colourful tropical fish and there's also abundant coral, although much of the near-shore coral shows signs of being trampled on – a consequence of the beach's heavy use.

You can walk around Mañagaha in 20 minutes; there are a few rusting **war relics**, including a pair of coastal cannons along the beach near the boat landing. On the other side of the island is a **colourful statue** and a **small monument** marking the burial site of the Yapese chief Aghurubw, who in 1815 led a group of settlers from the Satawal atoll in the Yap chain to establish a Carolinian settlement on Saipan.

Once the domain of Saipanese picnickers, Mañagaha is now overrun with tourists. There are covered picnic tables and free changing rooms with toilets, showers and coin lockers; you can also hire snorkelling gear and buy drinks.

All regularly scheduled boats to Mañagaha leave from the Outer Cove marina. The crossing takes about 15 minutes. Pacific Subsea Saipan offers a variety of tours (see p380).

NORTHERN SAIPAN

The northern tip of the island, called Marpi, has most of Saipan's WWII tourist attractions and some of the island's prettiest scenery. It's easy to explore as the roads are well paved; much of the roadside is lined with papaya trees and *tangan-tangan* bushes.

Pau Pau Beach

The north end of this beach (Map p373) remains pleasantly undeveloped, with soft sand, a picnic shelter, fairly shallow waters, and good snorkelling and swimming during high tide.

Originally named Papau, meaning 'bitter root', Americans inadvertently changed the beach to its present name – everyone except older Saipanese now uses Pau Pau.

A paved road just north of the Hotel Nikko leads down to the beach.

Wing Beach

This beach (Map p373) was named after the US navy aircraft wing that lay half buried in the sand for decades, *Planet of the Apes*-style, before falling victim to an aluminium recycling programme.

The south end of the beach has a shoreline coral shelf, but the north end is sandy and has good snorkelling. The beach sand is a pleasant mix of white shells and coral bits; vines of white and purple morning glory add a splash of colour.

Wing Beach is 1.6km north of Pau Pau Beach. Turn left off Marpi Rd just beyond the country club swimming pool. This unmarked road changes from packed coral to dirt after 500m. You should be able to make it down in a car, though it might get a bit rough if there has been heavy rain.

Banzai Cliff

Waves crash onto the jagged rocks below Banzai Cliff (Map p373), one of the places where hundreds of Japanese civilians jumped to their deaths as the Americans were taking over the island in 1944. It's a moving spot, especially when you get into the details of the story.

Whole families lined up in order of age. The next oldest brother or sister pushed each child over the edge, until the mother pushed the oldest child and the father pushed his wife before running backwards over the cliff himself. Although US soldiers dropped leaflets and shouted through loudspeakers that those who surrendered would not be harmed, the mass suicides were deemed preferable to the shame of capture and, it was presumed, torture.

Over the years the Japanese have put up a number of plaques and memorials to commemorate the spot, including a large statue of **Heiwa Kannon**, the Peaceful Goddess of Mercy.

TERROR IN TANAPAG

The quiet village of Tanapag was the site of one of WWII's most fanatical attacks. On the night of 6 July 1944, about 4000 Japanese soldiers hurled themselves in a banzai attack upon US forces, which were lined up along Tanapag Beach. Some of the Japanese had guns, but most were armed just with clubs, bayonet sticks, bamboo spears and grenades. The Japanese, honour-bound to die one way or another in the face of defeat, were intent on taking as many Americans with them as possible. As wave after wave of Japanese soldiers rushed down in the surprise attack, the Americans were pushed out into the water, across Tanapag Harbor and all the way back onto the reef, firing all the while at the unrelenting enemy. By the next morning it was all over and 5000 men were dead.

The turn-off to Banzai Cliff is off Marpi Rd opposite the Okinawa Peace Memorial.

Last Japanese Command Post

It was at the spot now known as the Last Command Post (Map p373) that troops of the Japanese Imperial Army readied themselves for their final desperate battle against American invasion forces.

Lieutenant General Yoshitsugo Saito, acknowledging defeat, asked his remaining soldiers to each take seven American lives for the emperor, triggering the banzai suicide attack at Tanapag Harbor (see left). Saito then faced northwest towards Japan and committed hara-kiri, thrusting his sword into his stomach while his aide shot him in the head.

Guns, torpedoes and tanks have been placed on the lawn below the concrete bunker, which served as the command post. The bunker, which was built into the rock face, is cleverly concealed. Climb up inside and scramble around.

Suicide Cliff

Eight hundred metres beyond the command post, you'll come to a fork – bear right. At a second fork, 1.6km further on, continue straight ahead to get to the Grotto and Bird Island (below), or bear right to get to Suicide Cliff (Map p373).

From this turn-off, it's 3.2km up to Suicide Cliff. Follow the paved road all the way. Some of the signs read 'Laderan Banadero', the Chamorro name for this area.

There is also a paved roadside path leading from the Japanese command post to the top of Suicide Cliff. In the early evenings, it becomes a popular (if challenging) spot for runners.

Suicide Cliff's 249m sheer rock face was another site for Japanese suicides, similar to those that took place on Banzai Cliff. The cliff provides an excellent view of the northern tip of the island. White-tailed tropicbirds and fairy terns swoop and soar in the wind drafts along the cliffs.

The Grotto

Among dive heads, Saipan is famous for this unique diving spot (Map p373), a collapsed limestone cavern with a pool of cobalt-blue seawater filled by three underwater passageways. Sometimes the Grotto is

calm and at other times powerful surges of water come whooshing in and out.

Once, locals who wanted to swim in the Grotto had to shimmy down a rope, but there are now steep concrete stairs down to the water. Tiny stalactites drip from above and massive spider webs hanging overhead make interesting photographs if caught in the right light. The glowing blue light at the bottom of the rock wall comes from the tunnels that lead to the open sea. There's a viewpoint looking down into the Grotto at the top of the stairs to the left.

To get to the Grotto, turn left 400m past the Suicide Cliff turn-off and follow the road to the end. Even if you don't dive, it's worth visiting for sheer aesthetic value alone.

Bird Island Lookout

The windy lookout affords a scenic view of **Bird Island** (Map p373), a rocky limestone islet close to shore and a wildlife sanctuary that provides a habitat for brown noddies and other sea birds. Bird Islands' east side is battered by open ocean while a calm reef protects the inland side. The purple beach morning glory that grows around the lookout cliff is known as *alalag-tasi* in Chamorro.

Bird Island Trail

You can hike down to Bird Island but not from the lookout. Instead, head back the same way you came and look for the start of the trail 1.2km on the right, shortly before the turn-off to the Grotto.

The beginning of the dirt footpath, which looks like an eroded driveway, leads down the hill through tall grass and a canopy of *tangan-tangan*.

At the bottom there's a coral-sand beach. The water is clear and coral formations provide good snorkelling between Bird Island and the beach. Currents are rough beyond the reef.

CROSS-ISLAND ROAD

The Cross Island Rd heads north from Garapan, turns inland to Capitol Hill, circles Mt Tagpochau, goes south through San Vicente and then heads back to the west coast, ending up on Beach Rd in San Jose.

Drive to the top of 470m **Mt Tagpochau** (Map p373), Saipan's highest point, for

the requisite excellent views. To get there, take the crossroad opposite Capitol Hill's convention centre, drive through the housing project and turn right. Continue a few hundred metres beyond the civil defence buildings and take the dirt road heading down to the right. Each Easter, hundreds of Saipanese hike up Mt Tagpochau carrying a heavy wooden cross to plant at the top. There are excellent views of most of the island from the summit.

On the way to San Vicente, just past Pagago, is the **Saipan Botanical Garden** (Map p373; ☎ 256 7780; botanicalgarden@cnmi-guide.com), featuring around 2000 types of tropical plants over 3 hectares. You're allowed to taste tropical fruits and there are BBQ facilities. The views over the ocean are good.

EAST-COAST BEACHES

Much of Saipan's east coast is rugged shoreline battered by heavy seas, although there are some protected areas. Most of these beaches can be difficult to reach, as they're at the end of dirt roads that are subject to washouts after heavy rains.

Profile Beach (Map p373) is an isolated little beach with a limestone islet called Old Man by the Sea (it does look remarkably like the laughing head of an old man). To get there turn off Cross Island Rd at the south end of Capitol Hill. Take a left at the fork and park about 30m down. The trailhead is on the right side of the road and it's about a 20-minute hike to the beach.

Tank, Marine and Laulau are other east-coast beaches that can all be reached by dirt roads. **Laulau Beach** (Map p373), on the north side of Magicienne Bay, is one of the more popular and protected beaches on the east coast and is good for beach dives.

Another popular remote beach is **Forbidden Island** (Map p373), which has a long stretch of beach, a grotto and a swimming hole. It's on an islandlike peninsula south-east of the Laolao Bay Golf Resort and requires a 20-minute hike to reach.

SOUTHERN SAIPAN

San Jose, Susupe, Chalan Kanoa and San Antonio were once distinct villages on Saipan's southwest coast until a decade of development turned Beach Rd into a nearly continuous strip of nightclubs, restaurants and shopping centres. Beach Rd has a few

interesting war relics, including a **Japanese tank** (Map p376).

Ladder and Obyan are two south-coast beaches that get a few local picnickers, but are well off the tourist track. To reach them, go around the southwest tip of the airport runway. The road to Ladder Beach is on the right 400m after passing the turn-off to Koblerville.

Ladder Beach (Map p373) is a rounded cove backed with 9m limestone cliffs. Most of it is covered with chunky coral pebbles and the water is generally too rough for swimming. There are large caves in the cliffs that are used as picnic shelters, complete with picnic tables.

More appealing for swimmers is **Obyan Beach** (Map p373), a pretty, expansive white-sand beach with calm waters protected by Naftan Point; it's good for shelling and snorkelling. At the head of the parking area is a large WWII concrete bunker, and just inland from a grove of coconut trees are the remains of eight **latte stones** that have been carbon dated to around 1500 BC. They're in two parallel rows and are thought to have once supported a beachside structure.

The turn-off down to Obyan Beach is 2.4km beyond Ladder Beach.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Saipan's most unusual and exciting dive is the **Grotto** (p378). It's for experienced and fit divers only, who will keep company with turtles, sharks and sometimes a manta ray; the currents can be quite tricky, so get a thorough briefing beforehand. Other popular dives include **war wrecks** in Tanapag Harbor (see the boxed text, p378), **caves and garden eels** at Obyan Beach (above) and a **huge coral head** offshore from Susupe (p379).

Saipan's best snorkelling is at Mañagaha Island (p377). Pau Pau (p377), Wing (p377) and Laulau (p379) beaches are reasonably good bets and you can also try snorkelling the US Army tanks (Map p376) off Susupe's Kilili Beach.

DIVE SHOPS

Most cater to the Japanese market. Among the few English-speaking operations:

Speedy Turtle (☎ 234 6284; ejavier@speedyturtle.com)

Stingray Divers (Map p376; ☎ 233 6100; stingraydivers@saipan.com; Gualo Rai)

Hiking & Jogging

Saipan has a number of options for good walking, including the jogging trail that begins at the north side of Micro Beach (p375) and the trek to Forbidden Island (p379). The northern part of the island holds some overgrown forest trails. Joggers, Rollerbladers and strollers can also enjoy the **Beach Pathway**, a paved path running 4.35km along the coast north to Garapan from Kilili Beach Park (Map p376).

Windsurfing

Saipan is on the world windsurfing circuit. Being the only Marianas island with a large lagoon, the sport is popular, especially on Micro Beach (p375).

SAIPAN FOR CHILDREN

Saipan has some good options for the little fellas and the wee lassies. In Garapan, American Memorial Park (p375) and Sugar King Park (p375) provide many chances to throw the Frisbee, enjoy a picnic, and hide behind trees and war monuments. At the Old Japanese Jail (p377), you can pretend to lock recalcitrant imps away in the intact concrete cells, or lock yourself away for some peace and quiet after persistent cries of 'ice cream'. Take a submarine trip (below) to Mañagaha Island (p377) for guaranteed marine-type thrills, with tropical fish and colourful coral to feast the eyes upon; on Mañagaha itself, kids will love the chance to picnic and run amok on the beach. For watery thrills of a decidedly artificial kind, try the Pacific Islands Club (p382), with its boom-bastic aqua park: water slides, fake lakes and canals, all set to pumping goodtime music. Nonguests can play here for US\$25.

TOURS

Americopters (☎ 234 1304; www.americopters.com; Coral Ocean Point Resort Club, Koblerville) Half-island helicopter tours (adult/child US\$99/89) and the full-island version (adult/child US\$139/125).

Freedom Air (☎ 234 8328) Light aircraft available for charter.

Marianas Trekking (Map p373; ☎ 322 0770; Mariana Resort & Spa, Marpi) Biking (US\$75), kayaking (US\$60) and snorkelling (adult/child US\$40/25) tours, as well as the Eco-Adventure Tour (adult/child US\$65/45) and the Forbidden Island Tour (adult/child US\$95/55).

Pacific Subsea Saipan (Map p373; ☎ 322 7746; managahatour@cnmi-guide.com) Operates the *Deepstar 48*

submarine, which goes out six times daily in the lagoon between Saipan and Mañagaha Island; underwater sights include the ruins of a Japanese freighter and an American B-29 (adult/child US\$75/40). They also do a non-sub Mañagaha Island Tour (adult/child US\$34/25) – parasailing is an extra US\$56/45, banana boating an extra US\$24/31, snorkelling an extra US\$36/40, and lunch an extra US\$14/10. Or you can take the submarine tour combined with the Mañagaha Island tour (adult/child US\$95/60). Finally, there's the Tropical Dream Cruise aboard a two-deck cruiser, with dinner and island dancing (adult/child US\$55/35); combine this with the sub tour (adult/child US\$118/65).

Saipan Sunset Cruise (☎ 234 8230) Operates the *Jade Lady III*, an 18m sailing catamaran for sunset cruises (adult/child US\$65/40) and the Mañagaha Island Picnic (adult/child US\$45/30).

SLEEPING

Most accommodation options are along Beach Rd, many in Garapan.

Budget

Century Hotel (Map p376; ☎ 233 1420; www.century-hotel-saipan.com; Middle Rd, Garapan; s/d US\$60/66; ☎) This one's a good, clean, no-fuss option, with pleasant, spacious rooms and wireless Internet. It has a nice array of staff and the location is away from boisterous Beach Rd, but still central.

Valley Inn (Map p373; ☎ 234 7018; valleyin@itecnmi.com; r US\$40; ☎) An excellent choice if you don't mind being inland: the location (a

five-minute drive from the airport) is really only practical if you plan to rent a car. The staff are cheery and helpful and the pleasant rooms surround a central courtyard.

Saipan Ocean View Hotel (Map p376; ☎ 234 8900; sovh@itecnmi.com; Beach Rd, Garapan; r/stc US\$61/71; ☎) Modern rooms, a good location, and an agreeable room-and-car package (US\$99).

Midrange

Hafadai Beach Hotel (Map p376; ☎ 234 6495; Garapan; r from US\$130) The foyer has a Roman-aqueduct, stone-courtyard kind of feel. The exterior and the hallways are a bit musty and rundown but the rooms are clean enough, if nothing flash. There's a nice garden area and a beach out back.

Top End

Hotel Nikko Saipan (Map p373; ☎ 322 3311; www.hotel-nikkosaipan.com; San Roque; s/d US\$120/130; ☎) Relax: no-one's being tortured and everyone's having a great time – that piercing shriek you hear is just the three ultranoisy, caged parrots in the lobby. The Nikko's rooms are plush and comfortable (deluxe is basically the same as standard, but with a few extra amenities like bathrobes), the grounds are enormous and the architecture is pulse popping (think retro '70s sci fi; *Logan's Run*, perhaps?).

Fiesta Resort & Spa (Map p373; ☎ 234 6412; www.daiichi-saipan.com; Garapan; r from US\$240; ☎) This place (formerly the Dai-ichi Saipan) has elegant rooms and it's worth paying a bit extra for the ones with ocean views; come sunset time, you'll be thankful you did. The grounds are spacious and the staff are charming.

Hyatt Regency Saipan (Map p376; ☎ 234 1234; www.saipan.regency.hyatt.com; Garapan; r from US\$310; ☎) The rooms are a bit small and a bit cheesy, with peach-and-marble décor, but the views are lovely: peer over the superb grounds with the big lake in the middle and out to the ocean. The open-air, open-plan bar is good for a drink any time.

Also recommended:
Aqua Resort Club (Map p373; ☎ 322 1234; www.aqua-resortsaipan.com; Tanapag; r from US\$270; ☎) Casual yet classy, with a fabulous beachfront setting. All rooms have verandas (most with ocean views).

Mariana Resort & Spa (Map p373; ☎ 322 0770; Garapan; www.marianaresort.com; r from US\$200; ☎)

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pacific Gardenia Hotel (Map p376; ☎ 234 3455; www.pacificgardenia.com; Beach Rd, Chalan Kanoa; s/d US\$63/72; ☎) Away from Garapan madness, the Pacific Gardenia features a gorgeous white-sand beach at the back of the hotel with an open-air bistro and bar. The 14 immaculate rooms, all on the 2nd floor along an atriumlike hallway, are large, well furnished and very comfortable; all have kitchenettes. The helpful staff can provide cribs, ironing boards and the like, as well as value-packed car-and-room deals for US\$97.

Sit on the beach with a margarita in hand, watching a perfect Saipan sunset, and just see if you can tear yourself away. The food at the hotel's Sunset Bar & Grill (p382) is recommended, and along with a second margarita, would cap off a perfect night.

You need never leave here, with its go-kart circuit, golf course and beach-view setting. Sleep in cottages or villas. **Pacific Islands Club** (Map p373; ☎ 234 7976; www.picresorts.com; San Antonio; r from US\$325; ♿ ♿ ♿) Clean, airy rooms arranged around a full-on water park.

EATING

Tori Hide American Sushi (Map p376; ☎ 234 9367; Garapan; mains US\$7-12; ☞ lunch & dinner) Serves delectable meals, like (conical) sushi and ramen plus all the greatest hits from the Land of the Rising Sun. Despite the name, this is authentic Japanese right down to the décor and the chef's funny little hat.

Cusina (Map p376; ☎ 233 3250; Beach Rd, Garapan; mains US\$9-13; ☞ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) This breezy, outdoor bamboo 'hut' serves zesty Chamorro food that's best enjoyed with a beer; the beef *kelaguen* (mixed with lemon, onions, pepper and shredded coconut) is a clear fave, as is the sashimi and braised fish.

Thai House Restaurant (Map p376; ☎ 235 8424; Beach Rd, Garapan; mains US\$8-15; ☞ lunch & dinner) Good Thai food and a good beer list to go with it. If you're not used to hot food, order mild, as even moderate can be quite fiery and the 'Thai-hot' is strictly for the initiated.

E'sy Kitchen (Map p376; ☎ 233 3550; Garapan; mains US\$9-30; ☞ lunch & dinner) This breezy Hawaiian-style restaurant and bar features indoor palms, bamboo chairs and rock-encrusted walls. The food passes muster, and it's mainly of a seafood bent: the paella is good, as is the blue-crab spaghetti.

To take advantage of Saipan's glorious sunsets, eat your tucker on the beach at the very appealing **Oleai Beach Bar & Grill** (Map p376; ☎ 235 1757; Beach Rd, San Jose; mains US\$7-20; ☞ lunch & dinner) or the **Sunset Bar & Grill** (Map p376; ☎ 234 3455; Pacific Gardenia Hotel, Beach Rd, Chalan Kanoa; mains US\$7-24; ☞ dinner), both serving fancies such as warm-beef salads, burgers and seafood.

Café recommendations:

Café at the Park/Java Beach (Map p376; ☎ 233 1012; Garapan; meals US\$6-20; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A fusion of global styles, a glorious rainbow of fish dishes, and the best espresso in the land – every flavour from Irish crème to Honey Thai. Has wi-fi.

Tan Marikita's Café/Herman's Modern Bakery (Map p376; ☎ 233 1727; Beach Rd, Garapan; meals US\$5-10; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Chamorro and American brekkies; burgers 'n' sangas for lunch. Also Saipan's best bakery. Has wi-fi.

DRINKING

The **Oleai Beach Bar & Grill** (Map p376; ☎ 235 1757; Beach Rd, San Jose) and the **Sunset Bar & Grill** (Map p376; ☎ 234 3455; Pacific Gardenia Hotel, Beach Rd, Chalan Kanoa) are the best places to be when the sun goes down and your mood is 'up'. Both feature live music most nights.

Jonny's (☎ 287 9019; Beach Rd, Garapan) A small, buzzing, open-air bar right on the street and in the mouth of madness (ie the heart of Garapan). It's hip and they serve good bar snacks.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

Saipan Megaplex (☎ 234 9000; Susupe)

Dinner Theatre

Sandcastle (Map p376; ☎ 233 8585; Hyatt Regency, Garapan) Lovers of high hair, inflatable pecs, dazzling teeth, California consciousness and diamante-clad women need only apply – if David Hasselhof was a building, he'd be this joint. And you'd be Hoffed.

SHOPPING

Garapan holds a bustling street market on Thursday nights, with food and art vendors, and dancers. There's also a farmers market (Map p376) on Saturday mornings by the beach in Susupe.

TINIAN

pop 3540 / area 101 sq km

Tinian is a peaceful one-village island just 5km south of Saipan. It's an attractive place with ancient *latte* stones, ranch land with grazing cattle, secluded sandy beaches, scenic vistas and some lovely crumbling architecture, like the Old San Jose Bell Tower, in front of which are two stone tablets etched with the Ten Commandments.

Further down the road is the US\$200 million Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino (see the boxed text, p384), a garish, neon-lit temple of vice that would do Vegas proud; in front is a brass tablet etched with the command, 'No thongs or singlets'.

It won't be the first time Tinian has been changed beyond recognition; during WWII the island was transformed into the world's largest military air base, earning a notorious place in history as the take-off site for

the aircraft that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (see the boxed text, p384).

ORIENTATION

Homesick Americans who captured the island in 1944 decided that Tinian's shape was not too different from New York's Manhattan Island, so they named the main roads appropriately. The two-lane Broadway, on the island's east side, runs in a straight line from San Jose to North Field, while 8th Ave, on the west side, runs from the airport to Chulu Beach.

INFORMATION

There's an ATM outside the Bank of Guam, one inside J.C. Café and also at the casino.

Bank of Guam (Map p385; ☎ 433 3261; San Jose)

Marianas visitor information centre (Map p385; ☎ 433 9365; Broadway, San Jose; ☞ 8.30-11.30am & 12.30pm-4.30pm Mon-Sat)

Post office (Map p385; San Jose)

Tinian Health Center (Map p385; San Jose; ☎ 433 9233)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

See p374 for information on flights and ferry services to and from Saipan.

Getting Around

The hotels provide free airport transfers.

To get to the northern sights, you really need a vehicle.

Budget (☎ 433 3104), **Hertz** (☎ 328 2233), **Avis** (☎ 433 2847) and **Islander** (☎ 433 3025) have booths at the airport; Budget also hides out in the Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino.

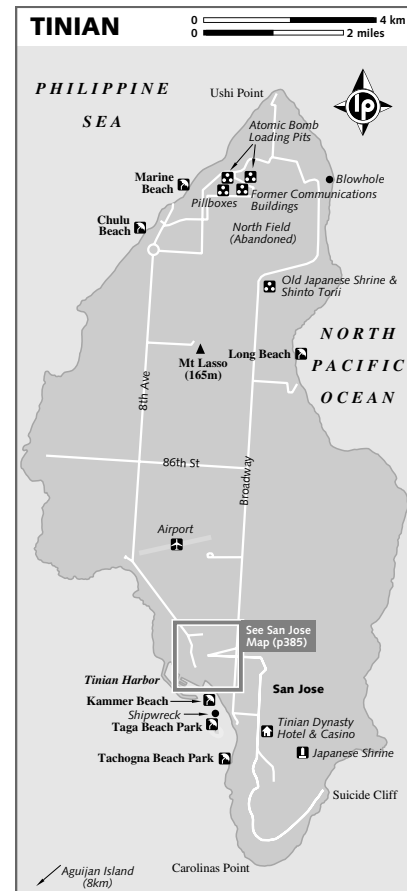
SIGHTS

San Jose

Small, quiet San Jose, where most of Tinian's residents live, was once the site of an ancient village of 13,000 Chamorros. The current population is partly comprised of a group of Chamorros who had been living on Yap since the German era and were resettled in San Jose after WWII.

The town is fronted by a big deep-water harbour that was constructed by US Seabees (naval construction battalions) for unloading the scores of bombs that were dropped on Japan in the final months of the war.

Taga House (Map p385) is an impressive collection of *latte* stones. They are said to



be the foundations of the home of Taga the Great, legendary king of the ancient Chamorros.

The grassy park contains a dozen or so pitted limestone shafts with capstones, some as large as 1.5m in diameter and 4.5m in height. One *latte* stone still stands upright in its original position, while the others now lie horizontally. The site is on the US National Register of Historic Places.

A few minutes' walk east is the Taga Well, which in ancient times supplied spring water to the island.

Kammer Beach (Map p385), also called Jones Beach, is an easy walk from the town centre. It's a nice white-sand beach with coconut palms, pavilions, picnic facilities, restrooms,

CASINO CAPERS

Why does this tiny island have a massive casino? In the mid-1990s Tinian voters, eager to get some of the overseas money pouring into Saipan, approved the development of casinos. Thankfully, this tower of glitter is happily isolated from the rest of island life, which continues at its same tranquil pace. But for how long? Apparently ignoring Saipan's economic meltdown, the local government is in talks to build an additional US\$300 million resort.

showers and a good view of Aguijan Island to the south.

During WWII, Americans staged a fake diversionary landing at Kammer Beach just hours before the actual invasion on the northwest shore.

To the northwest, next to the church, is the crumbling **Old San Jose Bell Tower** (Map p385), a beautiful old structure, very photogenic; it might put you in mind of a Sergio Leone film.

South of San Jose

There's good swimming at **Taga Beach Park** (Map p383), 800m south of town on Broadway. From the cliff above the beach there's a striking view of San Jose and some of the most brilliant turquoise waters you can ever expect to see; it's a great sunset spot. Stairs lead down the cliff to a small sandy beach. The water gets deep fairly quickly, which makes it a great swimming spot.

Tachogna Beach Park (Map p383), immediately beyond, is also good for swimming (and snorkelling), with its broad white-sand

beach. Both beaches can be reached by foot from San Jose; follow the coastal walkway that starts by Kammer Beach.

The best-preserved **Japanese shrine** (Map p383) on the island is in the hills above Taga Beach. Directions are convoluted; ask at the visitor information centre p383.

To get to **Suicide Cliff** (Map p383), follow the road inland from Taga Beach another 6.5km, bearing right first at the crossroads and then at the fork. In the hills above the cliffs are the natural and soldier-dug caves that were the last defence position and hide-out for the Japanese military. Most of the 4000 Japanese defenders listed as missing are assumed to have committed suicide inside the caves.

A peace memorial at the site remembers the Japanese civilians who leapt from the cliffs in a smaller version of Saipan's suicidal jumps.

Cow patties (step lightly) attest to the grazing done in the area, Polynesian rats hop across the road, and on a clear day you can see Rota.

North of San Jose

You can make an interesting tour of the island by heading north from San Jose along Broadway and then returning via 8th Ave. The route begins through green pastureland and makes for a pleasant country drive.

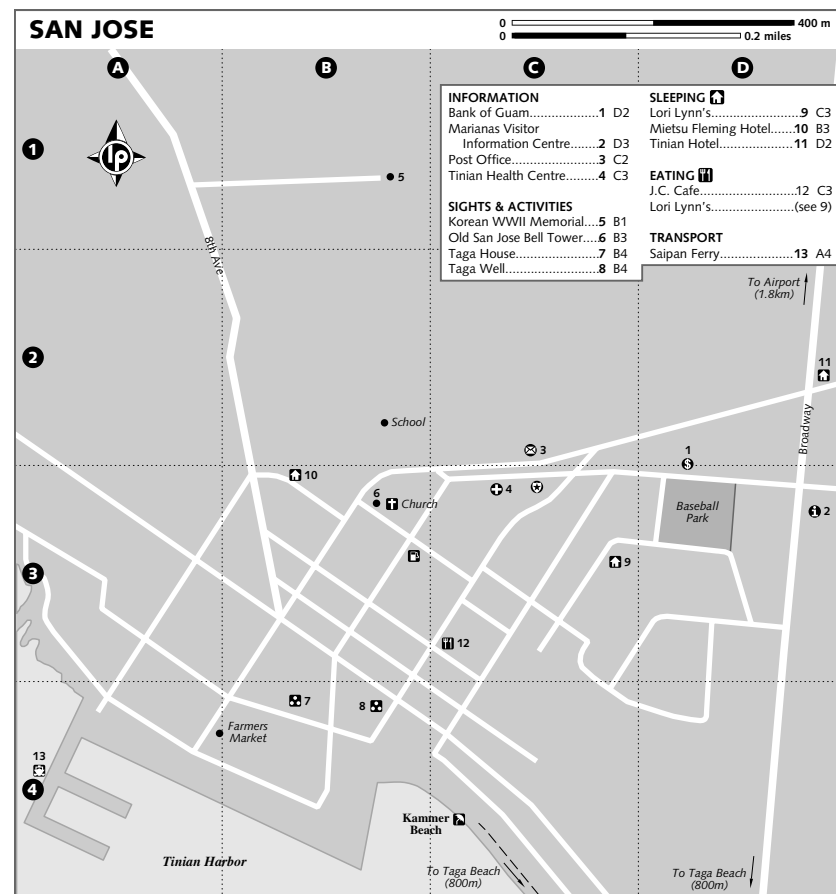
About 6.5km from the airport turn-off, a large **Shinto torii** (gate; Map p383) on the left is visible, the entrance to the site of a former Japanese shrine. Just ahead, the road circles a roundabout that has another **old Japanese shrine** (Map p383) in its centre. A little past this, Saipan comes into view. Along the rocky northeast coast, waves

LITTLE BOY & FAT MAN

In the early evening of 5 August 1945, a uranium bomb with the code-name of 'Little Boy' was loaded aboard the *Enola Gay*, an American B-29 aircraft. The four-ton bomb had been brought to Tinian from San Francisco aboard the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis*.

The *Enola Gay* and its 12-man crew took off from Tinian at 2.45am on 6 August and headed for Hiroshima, 2735km away. The bomb was dropped at 9.15am Tinian time; it exploded in the air above the city, forming a fireball that quickly mushroomed into a dark-grey cloud 5km wide and 10,668m high. More than 75,000 people perished from the explosion, beginning the age of atomic warfare; the final death toll reached an estimated 200,000.

The second atomic bomb loaded on Tinian was a 4.5-ton plutonium bomb named 'Fat Man'. It was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, immediately killing 75,000 of the city's 240,000 residents; another estimated 75,000 people have since died from the effects of radiation.



crash against the cliffs, in places bursting up through spectacular blowholes.

Turn right just after the roundabout and you'll come to the **blow hole** (Map p383), with towering water sprays as waves crash against the wave-weathered holes. Heed the fences, which warn of unexploded ordnance. It's a good place to bring a beer and relax (as long as you don't explode the ordnance).

The main road loops around **North Field** (Map p383), a massive network of landing fields and crisscrossing roads that once comprised the world's largest military airbase. Once inside the field, there's a confusing, huge maze of roads, airstrips and overgrown crossroads. Only lazy monitor

lizards bask in the sun on the abandoned runways that once held rows of warplanes.

Recently, a man was charged with stealing bits of North Field and selling them on the Internet, a scam that has prompted the US government into looking at preserving the area as a protected historical site.

A road to the east, about 13km past the airport turn-off, goes to **Ushi Point** (Map p383), Tinian's northern tip. Follow the cliff road east for a good view of Saipan.

From the main road circling North Field, a road to the **atomic-bomb loading pits** (Map p383) is on the left, about 1.2km beyond the turn-off to Ushi Point. The pit sites are neat and sterile, marked with signs, plaques and plumeria trees.

Go south a few hundred metres from the loading pits until the road splits, then turn left, taking the first right and the first right again onto a runway. Continue on the runway until you notice a small overgrown road to the right going into the complex. Hidden straight ahead are a larger two-storey **former communications building** (Map p383) and low concrete **pillboxes** (Map p383) with gun holes.

From the Japanese buildings turn right, back onto the runway, and at the end of the road turn left, then take the next right to get to **Chulu Beach** (Map p383); a little to the north is **Marine Beach** (Map p383). These attractive white-sand beaches are where more than 15,000 US troops landed in July 1944. Archaeological excavations at Chulu Beach have uncovered three layers of Chamorro civilisation, ranging from 1500 BC to the Latte Period of AD 1000 to AD 1500.

About 2.4km south on 8th Avenue, a side road leads east to the 165m **Mt Lasso** (Map p383), northern Tinian's highest point. At the top of the mountain there's a Japanese shrine and a very scenic view of the island.

Eleven kilometres south of Chulu Beach, on 8th Avenue, turn inland onto a grassy path lined with palm trees. Not far from the road is a **Korean WWII memorial** (Map p385), built on the back of a carved stone turtle. Honeycombed into the nearby hills are caves where the Japanese hid from US forces.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Tinian has clear waters, an ocean bottom that slopes rapidly from the shore and a number of good dive sites. A popular dive is **Dump Coke**, which was a huge dumping ground for WWII junk; small Japanese tanks, jeeps, trucks, shell casings and other munitions can be easily spotted there. The Saipan-based dive operators on p380 do Tinian.

The best snorkelling from shore is at Tachogna Beach.

SLEEPING

Tinian is one of the better islands in Micronesia for camping and no permission is needed to camp on public beaches. Try Kammer Beach and Taga and Tachogna Beach Parks, with their picnic tables, barbecue

pits and showers. The white sands of Chulu Beach could do the trick, too.

Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino (Map p383; ☎ 328 2233; www.tinian-dynasty.com.cn in Japanese; r from US\$125) The rambling seven stories here contain 412 exquisite soft-pink rooms complete with minibar and safety box. The marble lobby is a wonder of...well, of something. Fake Greek statues adorn it.

San Jose's three smaller hotels are low-key and unpretentious.

Tinian Hotel (Map p385; ☎ 433 7000; San Jose) The pick, with nice rooms, laundry facilities and a restaurant. It accepts major credit cards (unlike the other two) and has in-room phones (likewise). It does tours, as does the Mitsu.

Lori Lynn's (Map p385; ☎ 433 3256; San Jose; r US\$40) Owned by a friendly couple, Lori Lynn's has 14 rooms over two storeys; the on-site restaurant is a favourite with locals.

Mitsu Fleming Hotel (Map p385; ☎ 433 3232; San Jose; r US\$44) Has 13 good-sized but tired rooms each with balconies, two double beds, a refrigerator and bathtubs.

EATING & ENTERTAINMENT

Try the local speciality, Tinian chilli pepper sauce, available from any store. Warning: it will blow your stack.

J.C. Café (Map p385; ☎ 433 3413; San Jose; dishes US\$8-10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Bedecked like a Midwest US café, this place has a tasty menu that includes chicken, beef, fish, squid and mussel dishes, as well as sandwiches and filling breakfasts. At night, it becomes a bar with dancing and karaoke (subject to demand, of course).

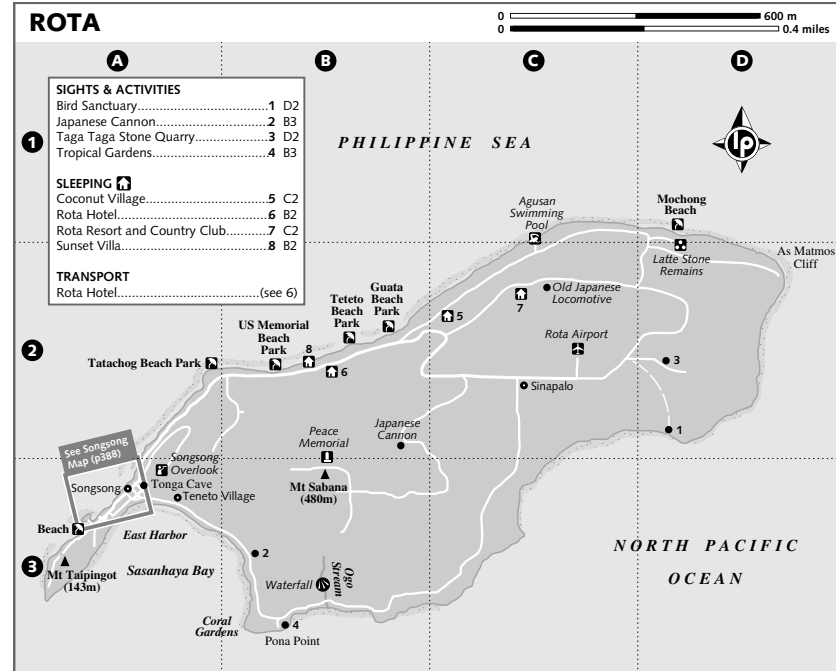
Lori Lynn's (Map p385; ☎ 433 3256; San Jose; mains US\$6-13; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serves Western and Japanese dishes and good Chamorro food.

The casino has the standard resort-style restaurant and a disco.

ROTA

pop 3283 / area 83 sq km

Between Guam and Saipan, Rota has managed to resist the influx of tourists from those larger islands, retaining a distinctively slow pace. In fact it's a bit like Groundhog Day here – nothing really changes from day to day and everyone's all the more thankful for it.



Indeed, the island's laid-back character and pristine beaches remain its chief attraction. Where else can you swim right in town and still have the beach all to yourself?

Rota is known as 'The Friendly Island'. Without fail, Rotanese drivers wave to each other as they pass (even as they, admittedly rarely, cut you up). You'll be playing the game too, so it's a good job the hire cars are automatic. How can anyone be expected to change gears with one hand on the wheel and the other permanently cocked?

ORIENTATION

Rota's main road runs between Songsong and the airport.

INFORMATION

Bank of Guam (Map p388; ☎ 532 3600; Songsong) Has an ATM outside.

Marianas visitor information centre (Map p388; ☎ 532 0327; Songsong; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 12.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (Map p388) Central Songsong.

X-Press (Map p388; ☎ 532 1466; Songsong; per hr US\$3) Internet access.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Around

See p374 for information on flights and ferry services to and from Saipan. The hotels provide free airport transfers. **Budget** (☎ 532 0801) and **Islander** (☎ 532 0901) have booths at the airport. Renting a bicycle is a great way to see Rota. Try the following: **Dive Rota** (Map p388; ☎ 532 3377; Songsong; 8/24hr US\$8/15)

Rota Hotel (Map p387; ☎ 532 2000; 3/6/10hr US\$4/7/11)

SIGHTS

Songsong & Around

Quiet Songsong, extending along a narrow neck of land on Rota's southwest peninsula, has a scenic backdrop in the form of 143m **Mt Taipingot** (Map p387), nicknamed Wedding Cake Mountain for its layered appearance. Songsong has an abundance of latte stones, with some used to landscape front yards.

A must-see is **Tonga Cave** (Map p387), on the northeastern outskirts, for a preternatural, eerie experience: this enormous natural



cavern is festooned with numerous stalactites and stalagmites, and tunnels and holes that disappear into the eternity of blackness. Tonga Cave was used as a Japanese military hospital during WWII, and serves as a typhoon shelter nowadays.

Take the bayside road east of Songsong for scenic views across the bay's brilliant turquoise water to Mt Taipingot. The narrow road alternately cuts along the coastal cliffs and dives through tropical jungle canopies. Beware of very steep drops along the edge of this road, which are not always obvious as sections tend to get camouflaged with foliage. Going over the edge could be fatal.

About 4km east is a **Japanese cannon** (Map p387), still painted in camouflage and pointing straight out to the harbour and to Mt Taipingot from a concrete shelter. The gun barrel can be moved from side to side but don't leave it sticking straight out or the next car going by could get whacked. And don't park your hire car too close to the barrel, as once the gun starts moving it's hard to stop.

Just over a kilometre past the cannon, there's an open grassy field on the right side of the road, which slopes down to **Pona Point** (Map p387), a wind-whipped rocky outcrop with a good view and excellent cliff fishing. A bit further east are various **tropical gardens**; for a small fee, workers will lead you through the innumerable groves of breadfruit, coconut, papaya, banana, star apple, and other trees. This general area is particularly scenic and well worth your time.

Eight hundred metres further down, the main road passes above **Ogo Stream** (Map p387; also spelled Okgok), which features some small **waterfalls** (Map p387). If you want to visit them you must first get permission from the landowner; inquire in advance at **Joe & Sons Food Market** (Map p388; ☎ 532 0392) in Songsong.

Central & Northern Rota

A turn-off near the airport leads to the Taga Taga Stone Quarry and the Bird Sanctuary. The **quarry** (Map p387) has nine *latte* shafts and seven capstones still sitting in

the trenches where they were being quarried before being inexplicably abandoned. Mosses, grasses and tiny ferns have grown up around them.

The early Chamorros quarried the *latte* stones without metal tools, possibly by building fires in trenches around the stones and then using basalt stone adzes to cut into the softened limestone. According to legend, the ancient Chamorro king Taga the Great jumped from Guam to Rota to establish a kingdom here, before putting the island's inhabitants to work quarrying these *latte* stones, which he used as foundation pillars for royal buildings. For anyone interested in Chamorro culture, this is an impressive sight. The road into the quarry is signposted and easily negotiable in a car. The quarry itself, 800m from the turn-off, is in a grassy park alongside the road.

The **bird sanctuary** (Map p387) lies on the eastern side of the island, down a rough dirt road 2.4km from the airport. Watch carefully for the turn-off sign to the right. A cliff-top wooden walkway is a sublime spot to watch or photograph all manner of sea birds and shore birds; a bird poster at the sanctuary entrance aids in identification. The best time to go is at sunrise or sunset.

ACTIVITIES

Rota's diving stands out for its excellent visibility: on normal days you can see 30m down. Interesting cave and tunnel dives, and sunken wrecks, complete the scene. The small island at Pinatang Park (Map p388), at the north end of Songsong, has rather sparse marine life, but swimming and snorkelling between the rock formations can be interesting and the water is clear and calm.

CORAL DETONATION

The zenith of Rota's diving used to be Coral Gardens in Sasanhaya Bay. Besides its huge platter corals, the area was home to the wreck of the *Shoun Maru*, a Japanese freighter sunk by an aerial torpedo during WWII, which lay offshore with three WWII Japanese auxiliary submarine chasers about 27m under water. The wrecks contained coral-encrusted trucks and assorted paraphernalia such as bathtubs, bicycles and motorcycles.

But the US navy decided that the wrecks were a hazard because they contained unexploded ordnance; in 1996, to the chagrin of divers, they blew up the three submarine chasers.

The story doesn't end there. In 1998 the US Marshall's office sold two illegal Chinese smuggling boats to Rota for US\$2 (US\$1 each boat). In June of that year the navy sank the two boats offshore in Sasanhaya Bay – no doubt to appease the Legion of the Chagrined.

Dive Rota (Map p388; ☎ 532 3377; www.diverota.com; Songsong) is a small, personalised dive operation offering one-/two-/three-tank dives (US\$50/80/110), night dives (US\$60), fishing/trolling trips (two hours/half a day US\$225/350), and snorkelling trips (US\$25).

SLEEPING

Many of Rota's public beach parks allow camping; take all the usual precautions.

Most places will do airport transfers, usually for a small fee.

Coconut Village (Map p387; ☎ 532 3448; coconut@gtepacific.net; r from US\$60; ☎ ☎) These charming duplex cottages have got an island thing going on: peaked roofs and rattan furnishings, along with small Japanese-style soaking tubs. From the airport, go past the turn-off to the Rota Resort and Country Club and watch for a small, unmarked dirt road leading sharply right along the coast at the bottom of the hill.

Coral Gardens Hotel (Map p388; ☎ 532 3201; kinrit@gtepacific.net; Songsong; s/d US\$44/50; ☎ ☎) This place is a winner. The compact, neat rooms, although not the height of luxury, are comfortable with all mod cons, and each has a balcony that commands a sublime ocean-view vista.

Rota Resort & Country Club (Map p387; ☎ 532 1155; www.rr-cc.net; ste from US\$230; ☎ ☎) Perched regally atop an 18-hole golf course with sea views, this is the clear choice for luxury seekers; travellers who call beforehand may be able to negotiate a lower rate with the management. Rooms are big, clean and comfy, with bouncy beds (and, regrettably, cheesy floral quilts). Facilities include a nature spa, a children's activity station, restaurants and a pool with a swim-up bar.

Rota Hotel (Map p387; ☎ 532 2000; www.rotahotel.com; d/st from US\$105/210; 🍽️ 🍷) Big and spacious, clean and comfortable, friendly and serviceable. Yes, all the key words apply here, just as you would expect at a hotel of this kind on an island like Rota. Bird-watching and sightseeing tours are available.

Sunset Villa (Map p387; ☎ 532 8445; sunsetvilla@vzpacifica.net; s/d from US\$55/65; 🍽️ 🍷) Right on the water and offering sparkling bungalow-style accommodation, some with ocean-view balconies. Double rooms have Jacuzzis, all rooms have king-size beds, and children under 12 stay for free. There's a café on site and they run tours on request.

Hotel Valentino (Map p388; ☎ 532 8466; diego@gtepacific.net; Songsong; s/d from US\$49/54; 🍽️ 🍷) Clean, spacious rooms in an eerily quiet and impersonal hotel.

EATING

Pizzeria Bar & Grill (Map p388; ☎ 532 7402; Song-song; mains US\$7-19; 🍽️ 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular, Tex-Mex-styled joint serves Mexican food and Budweiser; the black-sashimi pizza deserves marks for attitude and effort and is not half bad. Eat it on the veranda on a warm night for best results.

Tokyo-En (Map p388; ☎ 532 1266; Songsong; mains US\$7-18; 🍽️ 🍷 lunch & dinner) This Filipino-staffed Japanese restaurant does a pretty good job of not only preparing reasonable facsimiles of its chosen culinary repertoire, but of also reproducing the atmosphere of your typical Tokyo house of chopsticks. Favourites include those grill-your-own meat extravaganzas with the grill embedded in the table.

Tonga Tonga Café (Map p388; ☎ 532 1010; Song-song) This is really just a nook in the backyard of the owner's house, all the better to charm you with. You can have coffee and sandwiches here, as well as steamed lobster and chicken *kelaguen*. It's not always open so call to confirm, or just pop your head around the back next time you pass.

Bay Breeze Snack Bar (Map p388; ☎ 532 7575; Songsong; mains US\$5-11; 🍽️ 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This cheery waterside restaurant features an open-air eating area and reasonable food, including burritos, seafood and some unusual appetisers like...gulp...chicken gizzards. All served with a big Rotanese smile.

As Pari's (Map p388; ☎ 532 3356; Songsong; mains US\$8-29; 🍽️ 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A bar/

restaurant with adequate dishes including steak and milkfish.

SHOPPING

Luta Gallery (Map p388; ☎ 532 9653; Songsong) They've a good range of souvenirs and local handicrafts: sea-urchin and hemp jewellery, ceramics, woodcarvings and more.

NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Add a 10% hotel tax to all room rates. Many resort hotels have periodic discounts; call to inquire and always check the websites of the major hotels. Rates can be discounted as much as 50%.

During the Japanese holiday season, particularly Christmas through January and mid-July through August, it can be very difficult to find accommodation; advance reservations are recommended.

ACTIVITIES

All islands have good diving. A junkyard of WWII equipment lies just off Tinian; Rota has some wrecks; and Saipan has the challenging Grotto.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banking hours are typically Monday to Thursday from 10am to 3pm and Friday from 10am to 6pm. Most Saipan and Tinian businesses are open weekdays from 8am to 5pm. On Rota, hours are earlier: 7.30am to 11.30am and 12.30pm to 4.30pm is typical.

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Marianas Variety* is published six days a week and the *Saipan Tribune* five days a week; all islands have access to cable TV.
- The video format is NTSC.
- The Marianas' electricity is single-phase 60Hz, 115/230V AC, with two-prong US-style plugs.
- The CNMI, like the US, uses the imperial system. See the Quick Reference page for a conversion table.

CHILDREN

You won't have too much trouble travelling around the Marianas with kids, but bear in mind that Tinian and Rota have only a few basic stores. Stock up on essentials at Saipan's department stores before visiting these islands.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

The CNMI uses US embassies.

Embassies & Consulates in Northern Mariana Islands

Japan (☎ 323 7201; PO Box 500407, Saipan) Embassy.
Philippines (☎ 234 1848; 5th fl, Nauru bldg, Susupe) Consulate.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For a full list of events and festivals in the Mariana islands, see www.mymarianas.com.

February

Micronesian Open Boardsailing Regatta Held at Micro Beach.

Saipan Laguna Regatta Also at Micro Beach.

April

Flame Tree Arts Festival A very popular weekend-long event attracting participants from all over the Pacific. Art exhibits, musicians and dancers on several stages at Micro Beach Park.

Tagaman Triathlon (www.tagaman.com) Consists of a 2km swim, a 60km bike ride and a 15km run. Attracts international competitors.

May

Taste of the Marianas The Marianas visitor information centre in Saipan (see p373) organises this food festival held on each Saturday night in May at the American Memorial Park. Bands play in thatched-roof huts constructed for the event as competitions are held between Saipan's top restaurants.

July

Liberation Day Festival Week-long festival celebrating the American liberation of the Mariana islands; ends 4 July, US Independence Day. Includes a beauty pageant, nightly entertainment, games and food.

Tour De Tinian (mvtinian@vzpacifica.net) Nineteen kilometres of on-road and off-road biking competition through historic sites and jungle.

November

Rota Blue Triathlon (kfc-onishi@gem.hi-ho.ne.jp) Two types: Olympic and Iron Man.

MARIANAFEST

Like Guam, most villages have an annual fiesta honouring their patron saint. Everyone is welcome to join the feasting, dances and cultural events, although, in Rota and Tinian, finding accommodation at that time can be a challenge.

Saipan

San Vicente Early April
San Antonio Mid-June
Chalan Kanoa Mid-July
San Roque Mid-August
Tanapag Early October
Koblerville Late October

Rota

Sinapalo Second Saturday in March.
San Francisco de Borja On the second Sunday of October, this is the Northern Mariana's largest and most popular fiesta, honouring Songsong's patron saint and attracting people from throughout the Marianas. Events include a luau-like feast of Chamorro food, religious processions, music and dancing.

Tinian

San Jose Fiesta Last weekend in April or the first weekend in May.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Check out the **Marianas Visitors Authority** (www.mymarianas.com).

MONEY

Credit cards are widely used. A tip of at least 10% is expected at most restaurants. See the Quick Reference page for exchange rates.

TELEPHONE

The CNMI's international telephone code is ☎ 670 and there are no area codes.

TIME

The time in the CNMI is GMT + 10 hours.

VISAS

US citizens need no visa and can stay as long as they like; non-US citizens can stay visa-free for up to 30 days. Tourists can apply for an extension of up to two months.

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper:** US\$0.50
- **Coffee:** US\$3
- **Taxi from the airport to Garapan:** US\$25
- **Car hire:** from US\$45 per day
- **Snorkelling tour:** US\$40

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** US\$1
- **Litre of bottled water** US\$1.20
- **Can of Budweiser beer** US\$0.80
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$15
- **Spicy beef snack** US\$2

TRANSPORT IN THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Saipan's **Francisco C Ada Saipan International Airport** (Map p373; ☎ 664 3500) is the CNMI's main airport.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM THE NORTHERN MARIANAS

Asiana Airlines (☎ 288 2625; www.asiana.co.jp; Saipan) Daily direct service from Seoul, Korea.

Continental Airlines (☎ 234 6492; www.continental.com; Saipan) Daily direct service from Guam and twice-weekly flights from the Philippines.

Northwest Airlines (☎ 1800 447 4747; www.nwa.com) Daily direct service from Tokyo and Osaka, Japan.

Sea

At Tanapag Harbor (Map p373) in Saipan, visiting boats can anchor in the commercial harbour or alongside the pier by the Mobil Tanks. Quarantine, customs and immigration officials handle clearance requirements, and you can get directions from the port captain on VHF Channel 16. You can go straight to Rota (rather than going through Saipan), though its harbour facilities are worse than those of Saipan or Tinian.

GETTING AROUND

Air

See p374 for details of inter-island flights.

Car & Motorcycle

Your home driving licence will do for up to 30 days; bring an International Driver's License if your home version isn't in English. Drive on the right-hand side.

Palau

The Republic of Palau is inimitable. Most tourists who come here like to spend their time underwater, for Palau is among the world's most spectacular diving and snorkelling destinations. It features coral reefs, blue holes, WWII wrecks, hidden caves and tunnels, more than 60 vertical drop-offs to play with, and an astonishing spectrum of coral, fish, and rare sea creatures. There are also some outright miracles of evolution: giant clams that weigh a quarter of a ton, for example, and a lake teeming with 21 million softly pulsating, stingless jellyfish.

But you don't have to get wet to enjoy Palau. On land the republic embraces Micronesia's richest flora and fauna: exotic birds fly around the islands, crocodiles slip through the mangrove swamps and orchids sprout profusely in backyards.

The Palauan archipelago is incredibly diverse, encompassing the polyglot state of Koror; the marvellous Rock Islands; Micronesia's second-largest island, Babeldaob (the land that Pacific standard time forgot); Peleliu, once war ravaged, now just ravishing; tranquil, tiny Angaur; the coral atolls of Kayangel and Ngeruangel; and the remote South-West Islands.

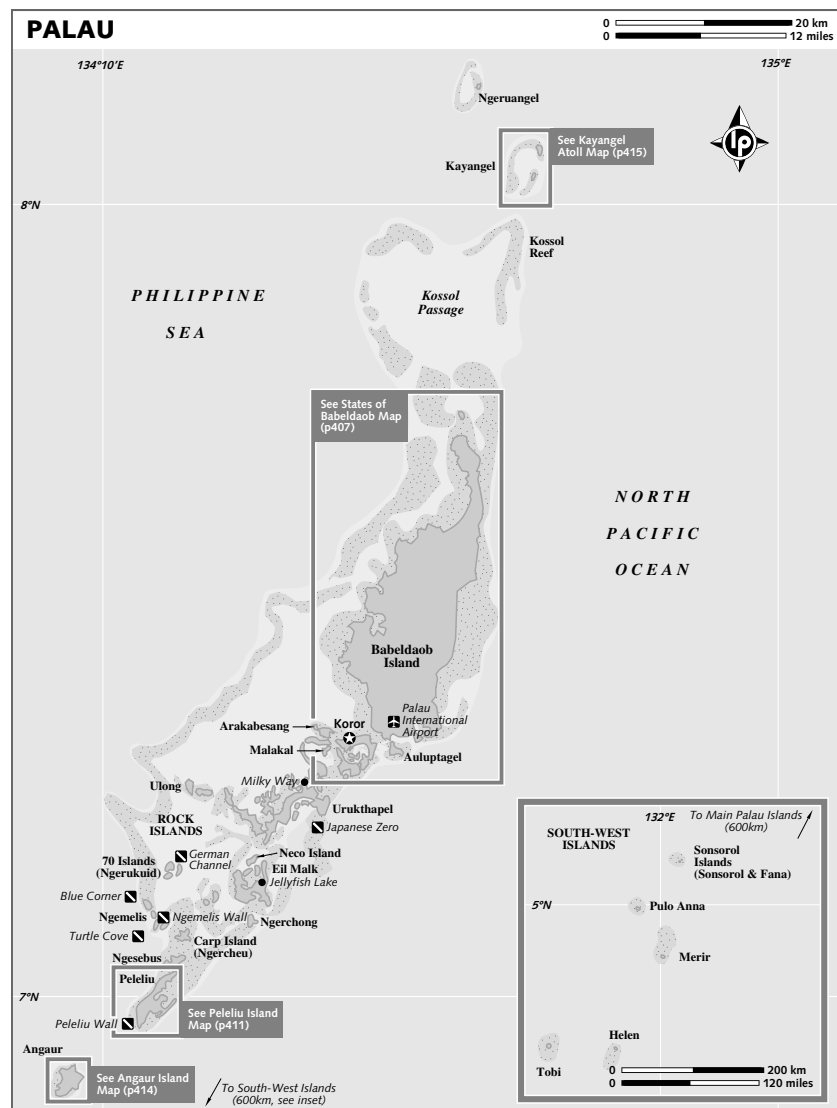
Toss into the mix some of Micronesia's most sociable (and responsible) people, and it's no surprise that parts of Palau are known as the 'beginning of everything', a template the rest of the world would do well to follow.

About that responsibility: Palauans love a good, socially aware acronym, and you can see them everywhere on signs and billboards, like 'WAVE – Welcome All Visitors Enthusiastically' or 'STARS – Start Treating Alcohol Related Symptoms'. You might find yourself playing this game, too. And perhaps you'll come to the same conclusion we did, that the name of this country is itself an acronym: 'Palau's Archipelago: Lovely and Unique'.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel and kayak around the surreal **Rock Islands** (p404), a series of mushroom-shaped limestone islets undercut by erosion
- Walk and dive around **Peleliu** (p410), a peaceful southerly island with a potent history
- Experience **Babeldaob** (p407) with its powerful waterfalls, traditional *bai* (men's meeting houses) and mysterious monoliths
- Sample the culinary delights of **Koror** (p403), including fruit-bat pie if you dare
- Take it real easy doing nothing much at all on **Angaur** (p413)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Koror's average highest temperature is 30°C, with the average low 24°C; humidity averages 80%. The annual rainfall is 373cm (there are numerous heavy thunderstorms in June), with June to August the wettest months; February and March are the driest, although rain can seemingly strike at

any time. As Palauan President Tommy Remengesau Jr said at the 2005 South Pacific Mini Games, 'In Palau you can guarantee that you can catch a fish if you go fishing, but you can never guarantee what the weather will be.' Although Palau lies outside the main typhoon tracks, it does occasionally get hit.

See p827 for Koror's climate chart.

HISTORY Clans & Land

According to Rock Island carbon dating, people from eastern Indonesia first inhabited Palau as far back as 1000 BC. Palauan culture was matriarchal and matrilineal: women inherited property (although it was owned by the clan) and men needed their permission to spend money.

In fact, land and money have always been a big deal in Palauan society, with clans ranked according to wealth. Villages were typically settled by between seven and 10 clans, and the chief of the highest-ranking clan was the village leader.

Spaniards, Brits & the Pox

The first European to sight Palau was probably the Spaniard Ruy Lopez de Villalobos in 1543. Spain claimed Palau in 1686 but did nothing to develop the islands.

In 1783 English captain Henry Wilson wrecked his ship, the *Antelope*, on a Palauan reef. The crew were treated well by Chief Ibedul of Koror, who helped rebuild the ship and sent his young son, Prince Lebuu, back with Wilson to England for schooling. The prince died of smallpox soon after arriving in London, a tragedy that touched the city's elite and sparked off a romantic melodrama that played on London stages and became a popular book.

The British became Palau's main trading partners until Spain expelled them in 1885. The Spanish introduced Christianity and a written alphabet before selling Palau to Germany in the wake of the Spanish-American War.

Germans & Coconuts

The Germans used Palauan forced labour to start coconut plantations and other business ventures, although by the time they'd taken control in 1899 only about 4000 Palauans had survived diseases introduced by Western explorers; pre-contact, the population was 40,000. The Germans took steps to contain contagious diseases by providing inoculations and instituting sanitary controls.

Japan & Expansion

The Japanese occupied Palau from 1914 until the end of WWII, establishing a colonial administration. Islanders were taught a

PALAU FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Koror
- **Population:** 20,600
- **Land area:** 494 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 680
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** Palauan and English (Sonsorolese and English in Sonsorol; Tobi and English in Tobi; Angaur, Japanese and English in Angaur)
- **Greeting:** *Alii* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.visit-palau.com

subservient dialect of the Japanese language and village chiefs lost power to Japanese bureaucrats.

Japan expanded the commercial ventures started by the Germans and developed many more. Traditional inheritance patterns were shattered as Palauans lost their land through sale or confiscation.

After 1922 all of Japan's Pacific possessions were administered from Koror, which the Japanese developed into a bustling, modern city complete with paved roads, electricity and piped-in water. Out of its 30,000 residents, only about 20% were Palauan.

In the late 1930s, Japan closed Palau to the outside world and began concentrating its efforts on developing military fortifications throughout the islands.

America & War

During the final stages of WWII the Allied offensive targeted Japan's Palauan installations, bombing Malakal Island and Airai State in March and July 1944. But the real battles took place in September that year on Peleliu and Angaur.

Before the invasion, most Palauans were rounded up by the Japanese and sent to central Babeldaob. There are islanders who insist that the Japanese planned to kill the Palauans, and that they even dug mass graves, while there are historians who credit the Japanese for moving the islanders out of harm's way (Koror and Babeldaob were never invaded, despite the fierce fighting on Peleliu and Angaur).

Palau & Independence

In July 1978 Palauans voted against becoming part of the Federated States of Micronesia, instead forming a separate political entity. In July 1980 Palauans adopted their own constitution, including a nuclear-free provision even though the US saw Palau as part of a 'defensive arc' (a fall-back, together with Guam and Tinian, in case the US lost its Philippines bases).

Disregarding the anti-nuclear constitutional provision, the US drafted a Compact of Free Association that not only allowed it to bring nuclear weapons into Palau, but also gave it the right of eminent domain over virtually all Palauan territory. In exchange, the US offered Palau millions of dollars in aid. In June 1985 the antinuclear Haruo Remeliik, Palau's first president, was assassinated; three years later his successor, Lazarus Salii, was found shot in an apparent suicide. Meanwhile, implementation of the compact and the new Western style of government triggered a power struggle between elected officials and Palau's traditional authorities.

In November 1993 Palauans voted with a 68% majority in favour of the compact, figuring that the Cold War's end meant the US was unlikely to build military installations on Palau. Palau officially became an independent nation on 1 October 1994.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

The concept of *omelengmes* – politeness and respect – is ingrained in the Palauan psyche. It might manifest itself in the act of standing to one side to let an older person pass, or crouching when walking through a crowd. Practising it indicates that a person is 'a good Palauan', that they are proud of their culture and tradition. However, a recent survey asked Palauans across all age groups and social strata to name the three things that worried them the most. The most common responses were the erosion of traditional values, the state of the economy, and the ever-growing influx of foreign workers.

Newspaper articles talk longingly of the old days, when tradition was central to daily life. Others say that those times were harsh, with crowded housing, hard labour, unwieldy power structures and food shortages the norm, and that in the move to push for a

BEST EATING

Palau rivals Guam for good vittles. Try the following:

- Dragon Tei (p403) features Okinawan and local cuisine, with a touch of class.
- Mexican, German, Palauan – all sorts at the convivial Krämer's Café (p403) bar/restaurant.
- Traditional Indian food is served with passion and flair at Taj (p403).

better (ie Westernised) life there has to be a trade-off – in this case, traditional values.

Not only is this a psychic schism that won't be easily resolved in the near future, it's a reflection of the issues facing Micronesia as a whole.

Lifestyle

Palauans are among Micronesia's most Westernised people. Although most are Christian, some still hold traditional beliefs based on nature spirits, clan-ancestral worship and village deities. Modekngai, a revived form of indigenous religion, was apparently founded as a nonviolent opposition to Japanese occupation during the war. Some Palauans leave a light on in their homes through the night to ward off unwanted spirits.

Traditional ceremonies are still held all over Palau, including birth ceremonies and first-house ceremonies.

Population

Of Palau's population of 20,000, around 4500 are foreign workers – the majority of these are Filipino, the next largest ethnic group with 15.3% of the population. The Chinese represent 5%.

Most Palauans have large extended families – if you spend much time with a Palauan you'll doubtless meet a never-ending lineage of cousins, uncles and aunts.

SPORT

Palauans love sport, and in 2005 the republic hosted the seventh South Pacific Mini Games (appropriately dubbed the 'Rainy Games' due to the notoriously wet weather around these parts). Palau did pretty well, too, finishing sixth out of 22 nations with

nine gold medals (as well as three silver and six bronze) – making it the most successful Micronesian nation, even above Guam.

However, Palau's Vice President Sandra Sumang Pierentozzi recently poured cold water on such success, criticising the amount of funding that goes into sport at the expense of education. 'Can those athletes live off their medals?' Pierentozzi asks, proving that she is, quite literally, a spoilsport.

Volleyball is especially popular in Koror; if there's a game on at the island's gymnasium, make sure you pop in for a vibrant spectacle.

ARTS

Intimately carved storyboards (see the boxed text, below) are a Palauan speciality. Traditional dancing is no longer as strong in Palau as it once was, but maybe more modern forms are, like hip swivelling pelvis shaking – how else do you explain the fact that Palau was the world's first country to produce an Elvis stamp?

LANGUAGE

Palauan is spoken at home and in casual situations, but English is more common in business and government. Sonsorolese and Tobian are more closely related to Yapese or Chuukese dialects than to Palauan.

Many Palauan words begin with 'ng', a nasal sound pronounced like the ending of the word 'bring'. The 'ch' spelling is pronounced 'uh'.

Palauan basics

Hello.	<i>Alii.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Mechikung.</i>
How are you?	<i>Keuangerang?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Ak mesisiich (sulang).</i>
Please.	<i>Adang.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Sulang.</i>
Yes.	<i>Choi.</i>
No.	<i>Diak.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental problems include erosion, overfishing and litter. In 2004 Palau passed severe anti-sharking laws, culminating in the frenzied spectacle of Palauan President Tommy Remengesau publicly burning shark fins and bodies seized from Taiwanese ships. Each bonfire typically destroys shark parts worth around US\$200,000 (if the parts were to slip through Tommy's ring of fire, they'd end up as shark-fin soup, fetching a high price in Taiwanese and Hong Kong restaurants).

However, Palau is nothing if not contrary when it comes to the environment. The republic is one of the very few countries in the world to support Japan's pro-whaling stance – unsurprising, given the nation's heavy reliance on the Japanese tourist yen.

Geography

Part of the Caroline Islands, Palau is Micronesia's westernmost region. The tightly clustered Palau archipelago consists of the high islands of Babeldaob, Koror, Peleliu

THE MASTER CARVERS: STORYBOARD ART

Palau's unique art form is the storyboard, a smaller version of the carved legends that have traditionally decorated the beams and gables of *bai* (men's meeting houses). The storyboards are carved from local wood (usually mahogany) and they portray scenes from a range of local myths and legends. Their genesis is interesting because, contrary to what many tourists believe, they're not really an indigenous art form. In fact, Hisakatsu Hijikata, a Japanese anthropologist, introduced the concept to Palau in 1929. Hijikata was smitten by the carvings on Palauan *bai*, but he was sad that no more *bai* were being built. So he gathered together a group of locals and encouraged them to carve scenes on pieces of wood for sale to the Japanese in Palau.

Today, some of the more interesting examples are a product of Koror Jail, where good-behaviour inmates have long been granted the privilege to carve storyboards and sell them to the public; in 2004 total sales amounted to US\$50,000. On the inside, the best practitioners are known as the Master Carvers and they've come to develop their own style, represented by unpainted, three-dimensional elements with an overt erotic flavour.

The Master Carvers take their art very, very seriously, and none more so than Baris Sylvester, the founder of the jail style. Mr Sylvester, when confronted with an inmate who claimed artistic supremacy, cut off the hand of his hapless rival.

PALAU IN...

Two Days

In the morning, catch up on some local history at Koror's **Belau National Museum** (p400) and the **Etpison Museum** (p400). Then make your way to Malakal for a gander at some **giant clams** (p401) and to indulge in some snorkelling at **Icebox Park** (p401). At night, dine at **Dragon Tei** (p403), a superb Okinawan/Palauan restaurant.

The next day, rise early for your **Rock Island experience** (p406). Snorkel with **stingless jellyfish** (p405), dive into **aquatic wonderlands** (p405) or take it easy on **Carp Island** (p405) with a picnic lunch. That's your whole day taken care of and you may now die happy. Back on Malakal, eat and drink at lively **Krämer's Café** (p403).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary. On the third day, hire a 4WD and drive (slowly; there's no choice) along Babeldaob's dirt roads to **North Beach Cottages** (p409), where you might want to stay. On the fourth day, book a **land tour** (p409) around Babeldaob's mysterious **monoliths** (p409) and stunning **waterfalls** (p409).

and Angaur; the low coral atolls of Kayangel and Ngeruangel; and the limestone Rock Islands. The islands run roughly from north to south, covering about 201km. Except for Kayangel and Ngeruangel in the north and Angaur in the south, all islands in the Palau group are inside a single barrier reef.

The South-West Islands extend 595km southwest from the main Palau islands, reaching almost as far as Indonesia.

Thickly vegetated Babeldaob is 43.5km long and has a land area of 398 sq km. Together, the other Palauan islands total just 96 sq km.

KOROR STATE

pop 13,300 / area (Koror Island) 8 sq km
Koror, Malakal and Arakabesang islands, all connected by causeways, form the core of Koror State, Palau's economic centre and capital, and home to almost two-thirds of the population. In prewar days Koror's

population was three times the size it is today and the town was jammed with military facilities, geisha houses, Shinto shrines, kimono tailors and public baths.

Today, it retains an energetic atmosphere. Many people come here from outlying villages for employment opportunities, joining a steady stream of workers from the Philippines and other countries. The result is a kind of 'interzone' (as per William Burroughs), in which histories are mingled and cultures are borrowed. Koror can be heady stuff (it has one of the Pacific's highest population densities), but not for everyone.

The actual island of Koror is not especially picturesque, but if you're at all interested in gauging the future of Pacific life, then you'll enjoy your stay.

ORIENTATION

Koror is connected to Babeldaob by bridge. The airport in Airai State is a 25-minute drive from central Koror; a taxi should cost around US\$20 (make sure you fix a price before you get in).

INFORMATION
Internet Access

Café@Palau (Map p400; ☎ 488 4323, 488 8336; Koror)

With wireless access.

Coconut Hut (Map p400; ☎ 488 2124)

PC Express (Map p400; ☎ 488 0757)

Medical Services

Belau Medical Clinic (Map p400; ☎ 488 2687; Koror)

For nonemergencies.

Belau National Medical Hospital (Map p399; ☎ 488 2554; Arakabesang) Has a decompression chamber.

Money

There's an ATM outside the Bank of Hawaii and one in the lobby of the WCTC Shopping Center.

Bank of Guam (Map p400; ☎ 488 2696, 488 1648; PO Box 338, Koror)

Bank of Hawaii (Map p400; ☎ 488 2428; PO Box 340, Koror)

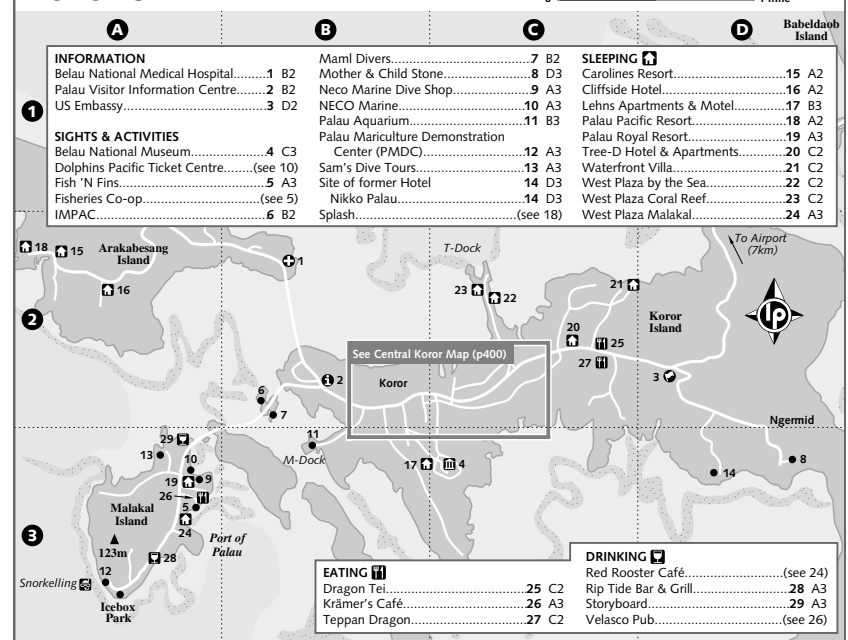
Post

Post office (Map p400; Koror; ☎ Mon-Fri 8am-4pm, Sat 9-10am)

Tourist Information

Palau visitor information centre (Map p399; ☎ 488 2793; www.visit-palau.com; ☎ 9am-5pm)

KOROR STATE

TRANSPORT
Getting There & Away

See p417 for details of international flights to Palau.

AIR

Belau Air (☎ 587 8090; www.gecpalau.com/belauair .htm) flies between Koror, Angaur and Peleliu on Thursday, Friday and Sunday (Koror to Peleliu or Angaur one way/return US\$50/90). It also offers charter flights to the Rock Islands.

BOAT

For details of official boat services to Peleliu see p410, and to Angaur see p413.

Getting Around

For a small Pacific island, the traffic can be unbelievable in downtown Koror, especially during rush hour. There's just the one main road and, especially on the way to Malakal and Arakabesang, no pavement to speak of, which means that walking can be a hair-raising affair. Legging it to Babeldaob can just about be ruled out, given that you'll

be dodging falling coconuts, feral dogs and that steady stream of traffic all at once. If you do set out on foot, just be alert – that's all we ask. Often, drivers will inquire if you need a lift; a small tip is expected.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels provide airport transport if you call ahead.

CAR

There are a few booths at the airport. The following companies in downtown Koror will be able to rent you a 4WD for Babeldaob trips. There are many smaller firms around, too.

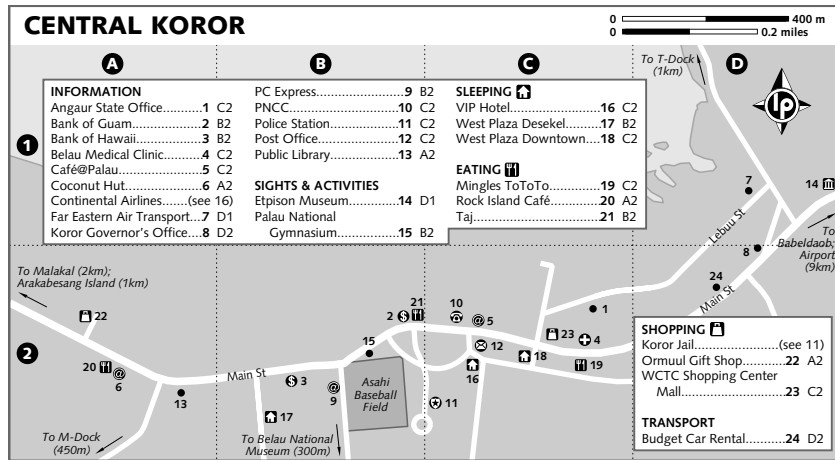
Budget Car Rental (Map p400; ☎ 488 4211; budget palau@palauet.net; 1st fl, Neco Bldg, Koror)

IA Car Rental (☎ 488 1113, 488 1395; iabc@palauet .com)

Palau Automotive (☎ 488 1040, 488 3140; palauauto motive@palauet.net)

PIDC Car Rental (☎ 488 8350, 488 8351; pidc@palau net.com)

Toyota Car Rental Airport (☎ 488 5599, 578 5599; T-Dock, PO Box 280, Koror)

**TAXI**

City Cab (☎ 488 1394)

Koror & Airport Taxi Service (☎ 488 4900)

KOROR ISLAND**Belau National Museum**

This nifty little **museum** (Map p399; ☎ 488 2265; www.belaunationalmuseum.com; admission US\$3; ☎ Mon-Fri 8am-4pm, Sat 10am-4pm) features exhibits from all eras of Palauan life, including artworks, photography, sculpture, storyboards and more. As you move between floors, it can be more than a little eye opening to trace the history of colonial occupation on this island; flying in the face of Spanish, German and Japanese forces, it's commendable that Palauans have managed to retain so much of their own traditions and beliefs.

The museum grounds contain a striking **wood-and-thatch bai** (men's meeting house), carved and painted with depictions of Palauan legends. Although it's a recreation of an older *bai* that burnt down in 1979, it is built in the traditional manner: constructed of rough planks with notched jointing and set above the ground on stone stacks.

To get here, take a short walk uphill from Koror's main road, then follow the signs beginning at the Palau Community College.

Etpison Museum

This private **art museum** (Map p400; ☎ 488 6730; etpison@palaunet.com; ☎ Mon-Sat 9am-9pm) houses artefacts from early Palauan cultures, although it's the exterior that initially catches

the eye: two human statues clad in traditional garb guard the entrance (accompanied by a massive arachnid), while a fishy mural, the bombastic creation of Hawaiian artist Wyland, covers the entire east wall (Wyland's a specialist in marine life).

Inside, rare exhibits keep things interesting: Palauan money beads, turtle-shell medicine bowls and some painted pottery dating to 640 BC.

The Etpison family are big players in Palau – they also own the Palau Pacific Resort (p402).

Palau Aquarium

This intriguing **aquarium** (Map p399; ☎ 488 6950; www.picrc.org/index2.html; adult/child US\$7/3; ☎ Mon-Fri 8am-5pm, Sat & Sun 9am-5pm) is part of the Pacific International Coral Reef Centre, a Japanese-funded research complex. The aquarium aims to educate about Palau's coral reef ecosystem and features 17 themed sections, each re-creating a different habitat. Here's a fun tale: when two yellow seahorses were recently introduced to the aquarium, one of them later gave birth to 150 babies. Oh, to be a seahorse. Not only do the *males* give birth, but they can knock out up to a thousand offspring at a time, although in the wild most of their brood will die due to cannibalism.

Mother & Child Stone

The village of Ngermid is home to the **Mother and Child Stone**, apparently the Lot-like remains of a mum and kid who were turned

to stone after the mother took a forbidden peek inside the village men's house.

To get there, head towards the airport from Koror; once you're out of central Koror, take the paved road to the right until you reach Ngermid. Look for the small sign on the left side of the road and follow the footpath.

The defunct Hotel Nikko Palau used to be in operation around here; some say it closed down after guests began to see the ghosts of Japanese soldiers killed in WWII.

MALAKAL ISLAND

Malakal has the Fisheries Co-op, the deep-water commercial port, small-boat docks and other marine businesses, and some good bars. At the southern tip of the island is **Icebox Park**, so named because it was the site of an ice-making plant during the Japanese era. It's now a grassy public park and although there's no sandy beach, there is access to the clear waters for swimming and snorkelling.

You can also gaze at the majesty of the nearby Rock Islands from halfway up Malakal Hill (123m), where the road ends at a water tank. From Icebox Park, take the steep, narrow dirt road to the left, just past the green sewage plant; it's a 10-minute walk.

Palau Mariculture Demonstration Center

So, you like bivalves? Come on, don't clam up. The **PMDC** (Map p399; ☎ 488 3322; adult/child US\$2/1; ☎ Mon-Fri 8-11.30am & 1-4pm), at the end of the road on Malakal Island, is a research marine laboratory engaging in conservation and commercial projects. It trains islanders in sea-farming technology and cultivates the threatened giant *tridacna* clam, raising millions of seed clams and planting them in reefs around Palau and other islands.

The *tridacna* grows more than 1.2m in length and they can weigh more than 225kg. Their fleshy mantles have intriguingly mottled designs of browns, greens and iridescent blues. They can live more than 100 years. And they get to travel: these farm-raised bivalves wind up as sashimi all over Micronesia. Palauans have long eaten the meat of the clams, sold the huge shells to tourists and ground the smaller shells into lime powder to chew with betel nut.

You can wander around the PMDC complex and peer into long shallow tanks of giant clams. Further back are deep, round tanks containing various species of sea turtles.

ARAKABESANG ISLAND

Once a Japanese military base, Arakabesang has a village on the south side of the island that's been settled by people from the South-West Islands, complete with traditional outrigger canoes.

After crossing the causeway northwest of Koror, the first road to the right has concrete pillars flanking its entrance; the next road to the right with similar pillars is the turn-off to one of the Japanese-era **seaplane ramps** – follow the road to the water. There's another seaplane ramp on the beach at Palau Pacific Resort on the west side of the island.

ACTIVITIES**Diving & Snorkelling**

With its calm, shallow and clear waters, the beach fronting the Palau Pacific Resort (p402) has some of Koror's best snorkelling. Colourful tropical fish bustle together with platter and mushroom corals, along with giant *tridacna* clams with iridescent mantles – mmm, some kind of fishy heaven to be sure. The resort charges nonguests a day fee to use the beach (US\$25 for adults, US\$12 for children).

Also try Icebox Park (left); to the right, towards the PMDC, there are fairly calm waters and a beginners' reef for those comfortable with overhead depths. Expect to find clownfish hiding in anemone shelters as well as crown-of-thorns starfish.

Palau's best diving and snorkelling is away from Koror; see p406 for a list of diving operators.

Sportfishing

You must have a fishing permit (US\$20). The following companies will obtain one for you.

Fish 'N Fins (Map p399; ☎ 488 2637; www.fishnfins.com) Full day US\$720, including lunch and transfers.

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) One to two people US\$450, each extra person US\$50.

Sam's International Anglers (☎ 488 5305; www.samstours.com/fishing.html) Run by Sam's Tours. Operates a fly bridge sportfisher and a power cat. Half-/full-day tours US\$400/600.

PALAU FOR CHILDREN

Koror has a few attractions that are suitable for kids. History's page can become children's stage at the **Belau National Museum** (p400) and the **Etpison Museum** (p400), while the **Palau Aquarium** (p400) is obviously suited to wide-eyed innocents. Take them to the **Mother and Child Stone** (p400) for an insight into what can happen to them if they're naughty.

Malakal Island (p401) gives them a chance to eyeball some **giant clams** (p401), and what kid doesn't love enormous, non-threatening, prehistoric-style aquatic beasts? The **Rock Islands** (p404) hold many delights for children, including the chance to **swim with dolphins** (p406). A **kayaking and Jellyfish Lake tour** (p406) is a great option for older children, while **Carp Island** (p405) could be good for a family picnic or simply just mucking around in sea and sand. Mysterious **Babeldaob** (p407) will keep your little hellions awestruck, with its scenic **waterfalls** (p409) and freaky **monoliths** (p409).

TOURS

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Koror sightseeing tour adult/child US\$40/28.

Mam! Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mamldivers.com; Koror) City tour US\$40.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (☎ 488 1755; www.neco-marine.com; Malakal) Four-hour Koror city tour US\$25.

SLEEPING Budget

Tree-D Hotel & Apartments (Map p399; ☎ 488 3856; www.tree-d-hotel.com; s/d US\$50/55; ☎ ☎) Bad pun, lovely hotel – the Tree-D is a terrific option, with likeable staff, quirky bungalow charm, wood-panelled hallways and pleasant, clean rooms (with a slight Japanese feel to the interior design). It's about a 20-minute walk from downtown Koror, good or bad depending on your predilections. Tree-D often offers considerable discounts for stays of three nights or more.

Lehns Apartments & Motel (Map p399; ☎ 488 1486; lehnsmotel@palaunet.com; s/ste/apt US\$45/65/85; ☎ ☎) In the heart of a leafy village, the pinky exterior will amuse. The standard rooms are as big as the apartments, but with fewer amenities: a TV but no phone; pots and pans but no stove; *Popular Science* magazines but no pop culture. There's a big laundry on the premises and the staff aim

to please. Heading west in the direction of Malakal, take a left turn just past the post office, on the street with a petrol station on the corner. Then, when the road curves left, take the first right.

VIP Hotel (☎ 488 1429; vipghotel@palaunet.com; Koror; s/d \$54/70) This clean and functional hotel is within walking distance of a clutch of good shops and restaurants. The 22 rooms do a good job of getting you to sleep in comfort, and feature queen-size beds, cable TV and private bathrooms. You can also opt for studio rooms with kitchenettes, or the large bedroom suites with kitchenettes. Beware: the service at times can be nonexistent.

Midrange

Waterfront Villa (Map p399; ☎ 488 5776, 488 2904; www.palauwaterfrontvilla.com; s/d US\$80/100 ☎ ☎) This place is not at all bad, with immaculate rooms, comfy beds, and ornately trimmed, marble-floored bathrooms. All rooms look out onto the ocean. Coming into Koror from Babeldaob, take the first right after the Dragon Tei restaurant and turn right again at the stop sign. Take a left about 400m on, into the first paved road, and follow it to the end.

The **West Plaza Hotel Group** (☎ 488 2133; west.plaza@palaunet.com; r from US\$70; ☎ ☎) has five Koror locations; book through the central number. Rooms are clean, comfy, roomy... and bland – perfect for the traveller who's not fussed. West Plaza by the Sea (Map p399) has rooms that face the lagoon, while

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Dragon Tei (Map p399; ☎ 488 2271, 488 5429; dragon@palaunet.com; dishes US\$8-35; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) Arguably Palau's finest restaurant, certainly the most beloved, Dragon Tei features a measure of Japan mixed with a dash of Palau. The Okinawan chef and owner is a true master, able to turn his hand to anything from *kim chee* hot pots with Napoleon fish to *rafute* (stewed pork belly) to the infamous fruit-bat pie. More conventional fare includes *okonomiyaki* (Japanese 'pizza') and baked fish in banana leaves. There's a palpable sense of conviviality, starting from the staff and trickling down to the customers; you'll linger for hours on end, just see if you don't.

Across the road is **Teppan Dragon** (Map p399; ☎ 488 1139, 488 8743; dragon@palaunet.com; Koror; courses US\$25-35; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue), run by the same people and featuring exquisite teppanyaki courses, including local seafood.

West Plaza Coral Reef (Map p399) has ocean views that also take in a parking lot, and that's probably only appealing to JG Ballard fans. West Plaza Desekel (Map p400) is above the Desekel Market grocery store, while West Plaza Downtown (Map p400) has only four rooms with street views; the rest have windows that look out onto the hallway (yuck). West Plaza Malakal (Map p399) has the Red Rooster Café & Brewery (p404) downstairs.

Top End

Cliffside Hotel (Map p399; www.sunrisevilla-palau.com; Arakabesang, s/d/ste US\$130/160/210; ☎ ☎) Get a load of that cracking view, right over the lagoon. Plump for the elegant and spacious doubles with the requisite views; the smaller singles aren't such a good deal (you might as well upgrade). The outside terrace bar, perched on high with more dreamy views, concocts a wicked margarita. At the time of writing, the Cliffside was undergoing renovation but some rooms were available.

Carolines Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 3754; www.carolinesresort.com; Arakabesang; bungalows from US\$155; ☎ ☎) This hilltop resort has seven bungalows that mimic traditional Palauan architecture, using bamboo and mahogany. The view over the Philippine Sea is great for gushy types, although the walk up to the highest bungalows may leave smokers, oldies and the terminally unfit short of breath. Guests can use the Palau Pacific Resort's facilities, including the private beach.

Palau Royal Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 2000; www.palau-royal-resort.com; Malakal; d low-to-high/peak season from US\$200/280, ste from US\$450/550) Here's the latest offering from the Nikko hotel group after their Hotel Nikko Palau bit the dust in mysterious circumstances (see p400).

The L-shaped building contains around 200 stylish rooms showcasing hidden angles and pine-and-cream interiors; a small, private beach with its own bar; a classy restaurant; and elegant grounds with rock-strewn water features and floating seating arrangements.

EATING

Palau has a legitimate claim to Micronesia's best dining scene (even though in numbers it has a fraction of the restaurants of Guam, the other contender). This is especially so if you have a seafood fetish – mangrove crabs and shellfish are as common as muck. But the grub can be quirky, too; fruit-bat pie is on many menus...so go on, make like Ozzy Osbourne and get a big black bat into you. They say it tastes like chicken.

Krämer's Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 8448; Malakal; mains US\$6-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Named after Dr Augustin Krämer, the German anthropologist and recorder of Palauan history, this 2nd-floor café serves delicious eclectic fare like blue-cheese burgers, skewers of fish with fruity papaya salsa, and blackened sashimi. There's no theme – just whatever feels good – plus a commanding view of the water, mountains and docks.

Taj (Map p400; ☎ 488 2227; 1st fl, PDC Bldg, Koror; mains US\$8-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is quality and class all the way, delivering traditional Indian with a flourish. Tandoori chicken is brought to your table impaled on what looks like a short sword and all the classics are here, like chicken tikka and rogan josh. Crisp, elegant and fresh food, served by lovely sari-clad staff.

Mingles ToToTo (Map p400; ☎ 587 2133; mains US\$7-35; ☎ dinner) A ridiculous moniker but good seafood and a reasonable Japanese

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palau Pacific Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 2600; www.palau.panpacific.com; Arakabesang; low/high/peak season garden-view r US\$235/275/305, ocean-view r US\$275/315/350; ☎ ☎ ☎) This place has a genuine ace up its sleeve. While the resort is one of only two hotels in Palau with a beachside location, the beach here is the clear winner: it's simply gorgeous, spread over 300m of sand. Alongside there are a swimming pool and a nifty bar: pure indulgence. Rooms have rattan furniture, tile floors, ceiling fans and private *lanai* (verandas). The fish pond has two resident green turtles – and they show no signs of leaving, either.

menu. Eat on an open-air patio overlooking Koror's hills – perfect for sunset moods. If you're lucky, a plucky member of staff might strap on an acoustic guitar and strum sweet melodies to no-one in particular (the poor, lovesick lad). The menu displays a sense of humour, depicting a fruit bat in a dish with its tongue hanging out. Mingles is on the 2nd floor, next to Surangel's store.

Further west, try **Rock Island Café** (Map p400; ☎ 488 1010; mains US\$5-13; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner), with good pizza, seafood and steaks.

DRINKING

Palau's local beer, Red Rooster, is worth sampling. The mango brew has a honeyed aftertaste; the light beer has a toffee nose; the amber comes on like a European lager, while the dark is a malty mouthful. Makes a nice change from the standard Micronesian diet of Budweiser and Asahi.

Krämer's Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 8448; Malakal) Gather around the bar, watch the boats dock and dream of sailing away to the Rock Islands. The staff are full of bonhomie, the drinks list is extensive and the menu (see p403) is champion.

Velasco Pub (Map p399; ☎ 488 7330; velasco@palau.net.com; Malakal) This intimate bar near the waterfront has an appropriate maritime theme with porthole doors. Velasco has good bar snacks and an authentic sense of fun, and if the weather's hot the outdoor area is cool.

Storyboard (Map p399; ☎ 488 1982; Malakal) A raucous joint favoured by expats and a few locals. The actual bar is a traditional storyboard – something like a Palauan Kamasutra. As the waitresses will inform you, one side is R-rated and the other X-rated. It can be fun watching the faces of squares who unwittingly choose the dirtiest side.

Red Rooster Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 6718; West Plaza Deskel Hotel, Malakal) Here's a place that could use a good PR firm and a makeover. It's the official café of the Red Rooster brewery next door but it looks like it belongs at a provincial airport. It's plastic and soulless and not enough fuss is made of the beer. Where are the souvenirs? The Red Rooster T-shirts? The take-home samplers? A wasted opportunity. Still, all the Red Rooster varieties are on tap.

For sunset drinkies, try the bar at the Palau Pacific Resort (p402) or at the Cliffside

Hotel (p403); both are impeccable, with fine scenery – the former has a wonderful beach, the latter a breathtaking hilltop location. The **Rip Tide Bar & Grill** (☎ 488 3486; Malakal) is a hip open-air bar on a nice artificial beach.

SHOPPING

Koror Jail (Map p400; ☺ 8-11.30am & 12.30-3pm) Sells storyboards carved by inmates (from US\$150); you can also commission work (see the boxed text, p397).

Ormuul Gift Shop (Map p400; ☎ 488 2575, 488 2165; Senior Citizen's Center, Koror; ☺ Mon-Fri 8am-4pm) Watch local craftspeople make (and sell) hats, baskets and purses out of pandanus and coconut palm.

ROCK ISLANDS

Comprising over 200 rounded knobs of limestone, the Rock Islands (known locally as Chalbacheb) are the crown jewels of Micronesia – a wormhole into another world, a vista of serene and surreal beauty. Totally covered with green jungle, they dot the waters for a 32km stretch southwest of Koror and are the reason why most travellers come to Palau. But while divers and snorkellers may get all gooey over the Rock Islands, they're a treat no matter how wet you like to get.

The bases of the islands have been undercut by water erosion, grazing fish and the tiny chitons that scrape at the rock, fashioning them into utterly unique mushroom shapes. The islands are home to crocodiles and fruit bats and are rich with bird life: kingfishers, reef herons, black noddies, white-tailed tropicbirds, black-napped terns, and introduced cockatoos and parrots. The surrounding waters contain some of the most abundant and varied marine life on the planet, supporting over 1500 varieties of reef and pelagic fish.

What's more, there are four times the number of coral species in Palau than in the Caribbean, including immense table-top corals, interlocking thickets of stag-horn coral and soft corals of all types and colours.

TRANSPORT

Most visitors see the Rock Islands via dive-shop boat trips (see p406).

SIGHTS

Marine Lakes

The Rock Islands hold about 80 marine salt lakes, former sinkholes that are now filled with saltwater and have a limited exchange with the sea. Variations in algae give them different colours and some have soft corals, fish, sponges or jellyfish. Each lake has a unique ecosystem, providing habitat for specialised creatures that have evolved in their waters over the millennia.

Jellyfish Lake is the outstanding example. You'll need to hike up over a hill about 10 minutes through the jungle to reach this mangrove-bordered lake. Mark your entry point into the lake to avoid losing your way back out, and be careful of slippery rocks around the shoreline where the water is murky and green.

Snorkelling in Jellyfish Lake is an absolute must; it's filled with millions of harmless transparent jellyfish that swim en masse to follow the path of the sun. Although the jellyfish have ostensibly lost the ability to sting, due to a lack of predators, they can give off a slight tingle, so don't be surprised if that happens.

Floating among these flimsy pink creatures – which expand and contract like so many pulsating brains – is like exploring the atmosphere of an alien world: inspiring, uncanny and spiritual, all at once.

You're not supposed to touch the jellyfish, so fragile are they, but that hasn't stopped Taiwanese tourists filling their bags with them for later culinary use. At the risk of stating the bleeding obvious, don't eat the jellyfish; they have no natural predators, so don't you start...otherwise they might develop their sting again in a few hundred years' time and give your descendants a nasty shock.

Carp & Neco Islands

For one-day outings, try Carp and Neco Islands, the private domains of Palau Diving Center (p406) and Neco Marine Dive Shop (p406) respectively. You'll be dropped off in the morning and picked up after the last dive, usually for the cost of the snorkelling tour.

Carp Island, also known as Ngercheu Island, is great for lazing around; getting there involves a long, scenic southbound trip through the Rock Islands. This is indeed a peaceful corner of the world, with a

white-sand beach lined with coconut palms and hammocks tied to shady ironwood trees. At high tide the Rock Islands appear to be floating on the sea; as the water recedes they become encircled by beaches and linked by sand bars, and all around Carp Island beautifully rippled shoals of sand appear.

Neco Island is better for snorkelling, though you'll see only half as many Rock Islands en route.

Milky Way

This cove is popular with those who love a good facial, for the water is actually an emulsion of white limestone sand. Dive down, scrape some up and apply it to your skin; the Japanese swear by its health-giving properties.

ACTIVITIES

You'll need to pay a US\$15 Rock Island use-tax, which goes towards conservation. The permit is valid for 30 days and you should carry it on all trips to the Rock Islands in case a ranger busts you.

Diving & Snorkelling

Divers share the waters with manta rays, sea turtles, moray eels, giant *tridacna* clams, grey reef sharks and sometimes even a sea snake, rare dugong or chambered nautilus. The sea temperature averages about 27°C and visibility extends to well over 30m along drop-offs.

The **Blue Corner** is Palau's most popular dive, beloved for its sheer abundance of underwater life. Expect to be totally bedazzled by the incredible variety of fish, including barracudas and schooling sharks, as well as hard and soft corals. Strong tidal currents nourish this chain of life, but also render it a dive for the more experienced.

Both the **German Channel** and **Turtle Cove**, near Peleliu, offer dives that will suit novices. Manta rays and mackerels are frequently spotted in the German Channel. **Devil Fish City** is also a good place for snorkellers, as is the Turtle Cove beach area.

The **Ngemelis Wall**, also called the Big Drop-off, is widely considered the world's best wall dive. From knee-deep water, the wall drops vertically nearly 305m; divers can free float past a brilliant rainbow of sponges and soft corals whose intense

blues, reds and pure whites form a backdrop for quivering 3m orange-and-yellow sea fans and giant black coral trees. The wall is also good sport for snorkellers who can see coral, turtles and anemones.

The Rock Islands host some intriguing wrecks, including the Japanese ship **Gozan Maru**. There's also a half-submerged **Japanese Zero fighter**; when the tide is out and the wreck is fully visible, it's a sobering sight. According to local lore, the pilot survived and managed to swim to shore.

DIVE SHOPS

Most dive trips leave Koror at 8 or 9am and return around 4pm, breaking for lunch on a Rock Island. Note that companies have bad-weather cancellation policies.

Dive Palau (☎ 488 3548; www.palaudiver.com) One-/two-/three-tank dives US\$70/110/155; night dives US\$60; snorkelling trips US\$55. All include lunch.

Fish 'N Fins (☎ 488 2637; www.fishnfins.com; Koror) One of the oldest dive shops in Palau. One-/two-tank dives US\$85/105, third tank extra US\$40; canoe and kayak trips US\$85; snorkelling and Rock Island tours US\$90, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$30.

Mam! Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mamldivers.com; Koror) Two-tank dives US\$100, extra dives US\$40; night dives US\$60; snorkelling tours US\$65; kayak tours US\$80; Rock Island tours US\$85, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$27.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (Map p399; ☎ 488 1755; www.necomarine.com; Malakal) Among Palau's largest operations. Two-dive day trips US\$110, third dive extra US\$40; kayak tours (minimum of four people) US\$90; Rock Island snorkelling tours (minimum of four people) US\$110.

Palau Diving Center (☎ 488 2978; carpcorp@palauet.com; Malakal) Owned by Carp Island Resort. One-/two-/three-tank dives including lunch US\$75/115/150, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$25.

Sam's Dive Tours (Map p399; ☎ 488 1062; www.sams-tours.com; Malakal) This five-star operation is hugely popular. Tours are limited to eight divers so, they say, you can 'see less bubbles and fins and more fish and reef'. Two-tank dives including lunch and Jellyfish Lake snorkel tour US\$120, third dive extra US\$25; night dives US\$60; Rock Island snorkel tours (minimum of four people) US\$90.

Splash (Map p399; ☎ 488 2600; www.splash-palau.com; Palau Pacific Resort, Arakabesang) A five-star dive centre. Two-tank dives US\$110 and snorkelling tours (which nondivers are free to join) US\$65; lunch is included. Jellyfish Lake extra US\$10.

LIVE-ABOARDS

Palau Aggressor II (☎ 488 6075; www.aggressor.com; d/deluxe US\$2600/2800) is a 32m diesel-powered

boat that offers week-long Sunday to Saturday cruises including 5½ days of diving. Each of the eight carpeted air-con cabins has a queen-size and a single bed, toilet, sink, shower and individual temperature controls.

Fish 'N Fins runs the **Ocean Hunter** (☎ 488 2637; www.oceanhunter.com; from US\$2700), an 18m, six-passenger boat which runs trips from seven to 14 days. Booking six months ahead is recommended, though last-minute discounts can occur if someone drops out.

Dolphin Watching

On the Rock Island of Urukthapel (Ngeruktabel), **Dolphins Pacific** (☎ 488 8582; www.dolphinsofpacific.com) is a 'marine mammal interaction, educational and research facility'. You can swim and snorkel with dolphins (US\$80) or scuba dive (US\$120) in their company. The ticket centre is at Neco Marine (left).

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) offers a Sightseeing and Dolphin Close Encounter Tour (adult/child US\$90/50).

Kayaking

God must have been into water sports, because the Rock Islands were made for ocean kayaking. Most of the dive companies offer kayak tours; see left for details.

Planet Blue Guided Kayak Tours (☎ 488 1062; csamstour@palauet.com), a subsidiary of Sam's Dive Tours, runs excellent trips (US\$90) and can transport the kayaks by speedboat to your site to spare you the paddle work.

TOURS

Most of the dive companies offer Rock Island Tours; see left for details.

Antelope (☎ 488 1059; antelope@palauet.com; Malakal) **IMPAC** (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Kayak and Rock Island tour adult/child US\$85/50; kayak and Jellyfish Lake tour adult/child US\$100/65; half-day Rock Island or Jellyfish Lake tour adult/child US\$65/40.

Palau Island Adventures (☎ 587 3333; pia@palau.net; Malakal)

Rock Island Tour Co. (☎ 488 1573; palauritc@palau.net; Malakal)

SLEEPING

The Rock Islands offer Micronesia's best camping; the star gazing, as you'd expect, is tremendous. Some islands have shelters and picnic tables, though none have fresh water; some are infested with rats, so do

your research. Bring protection from biting sand gnats.

There are no fees, just the cost of transport. You can organise for a dive shop to drop you off on a deserted island and pick you up later at an arranged time; they might even drop you off for free if you coordinate your schedule with diving or snorkelling trips (ie they'll pick you up from your Rock Island so you can join the dive group at the same rate as if you came aboard in Koror).

You can also camp on the beach near the Carp Island resort and use the outdoor public shower for US\$25 per night.

Carp Island Resort (☎ 488 2277, 488 2978; carp@palauet.com; cottages from US\$90) Run by the Palau Diving Center, the resort features four rooms in duplex cottages, each with two single beds, a shared indoor toilet and a porch overlooking the beach. Electricity is often off between 9am and 2pm, when guests are usually diving. There's an informal restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner.

BABELDAOB

pop 4600 / area 398 sq km

Babeldaob (or Babelthau) is Micronesia's second-largest island, weighing in at three-quarters the size of Guam. It's a mysterious place, physically impenetrable for the most part and shielding enigmatic monoliths whose origin and purpose is unknown (save for various theories about God). The east coast has beautiful stretches of sandy beach, particularly north from Ngiwal to Ngaraard, while the west coast has a largely mangrove-studded shoreline. Ancient stone footpaths connect many villages, the roads are dirt, there are no traffic lights, and resort hotels, for the moment, are a world away. You can imagine this is how all of Palau was in the old days. Babeldaob is sparsely populated, too; younger people traditionally make an annual exodus to Koror in search of jobs.

But none of this is going to last. In fact, it's all about to change in the most dramatic fashion (see the boxed text, p408).

GEOGRAPHY

Although Babeldaob is a high volcanic island, the highest of its gently rolling hills, Mt Ngerchelchuus, reaches only 217m. Babeldaob's Lake Ngardok, about 914m long



and 3.6m deep, is one of Micronesia's few freshwater lakes and is the region's largest natural lake. Parts of the island's dense jungle interior remain virtually unexplored.

TRANSPORT

Private speedboats, fishing boats and state motorboats going to Babeldaob generally leave from Koror's T-Dock or the Fisheries Co-op on Malakal; simply go to the docks and ask if anyone's heading that way. You can generally join a boat by sharing fuel costs. Some boats return to Koror the same day, some stay overnight.

You can get from Koror to the *bai* in Airai in a sedan, but beyond that you'll need a 4WD vehicle, given the nature of

THE PRICE OF PROGRESS

The Babeldaob state of Melekeok has been constitutionally designated Palau's future capital, a changeover planned for October 2006; already a clearing on a hill in the jungle has been made and construction of the necessary buildings is nearing completion. All that remains is to get people there.

You see, the thing is this: Babeldaob has traditionally only had a few dirt roads, which generally follow the paths of the once-extensive road system constructed during the Japanese era. Some states have just a few kilometres of roads that go through a main village and then stop; roads in one state don't always connect up with roads in the next. The nature of this system has always made travelling around the island a real challenge, and hardly worthy of a brand, spanning-new capital.

So, a few years back, the US committed US\$149 million to constructing an 85.3km road around the island. To mitigate the environmental impact, two conservation areas totalling 5 sq km were established in parts of Ngirwal and Melekeok states. Along with ensuring that politicians can reach their new playpen, this will make the island much more accessible to tourists. The exodus will therefore be reversed: officials estimate that, given these new developments, two-thirds of Koror's population will move to Babeldaob over the next 10 years, bringing their businesses, their families and their cars. There are even plans to build a resort in Melekeok.

Construction of the road began in 2000 and was due to be finished by 2003, but at the time of writing the damned thing was still under construction. Ask any taxi driver and they'll give you various theories about the ongoing delays, besides bureaucracy perhaps the most popular being the nature of Palau's unpredictable, stop-start weather. Frequent, fleeting rain (and subsequent mud slides) washes all the good work away, so they say.

When the road is completed, Babeldaob will be profoundly changed: physically, environmentally and economically – perhaps even spiritually.

Needless to say, not all Palauans are happy about paying such a high price for progress.

Babeldaob's roads. A trip from one end of the island to the other can take hours. It's possible to drive as far as Melekeok on the east coast and Ngeremlengui on the west coast along rough dirt roads (although rental companies may restrict vehicle use in these areas, and in wet weather the roads become impassable).

The Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) might be able to help with arranging a guide.

Folks at North Beach Cottages (opposite) can transport you to Ngaraard by boat (US\$250) or via a two-hour car journey (US\$150; maximum four people).

SIGHTS

Airai State

Airai, at Babeldaob's southern end, has a population of 2100 – and Palau's international airport. The state's relatively passable roads and its proximity to Koror make it easy to explore.

If you continue straight on the main road, rather than turning towards the airport, you'll arrive at the bombed-out shell

of a **Japanese administration building**, on the left just after the pavement ends. Here, a **Japanese tank** and a few **guns** rust in union.

Continue on the main road for about 180m to a security gate; past that the road splits. Take the road to the left to the **new bai**; it's on the right, 7.2km from the bridge. The **bai** is mostly made of concrete though it incorporates traditional features.

Beyond this, turn left at the T-junction. Shortly after, the road ends at Palau's **oldest bai**. It's over 100 years old, 21m long and 6m wide, with a steeply pitched roof reaching a height of 12m. It was constructed without nails, using local materials of wood and thatch on a stone platform. Chances are the keeper of the **bai** will miraculously appear – it's around US\$5 to visit the **bai** and US\$10 to photograph it.

Both of these **bai** have legendary scenes and symbolic designs painted inside and outside.

At Airai's southern end, **Metuker ra Bisech** is a quarry for Yapese stone money, with a stairway, handrail and covered rest station. It's about 20 minutes by boat from Koror.

Ngatpang & Ngardmau Waterfalls

These two outstanding water features are probably Babeldaob's top attractions. **Ngatpang waterfall** is more popular with tourists, given that it's closer to Koror and therefore relatively easy to access. There's a reasonably challenging hike through the slippery forest path to the river valley and the waterfalls' base, where, naturally, a swim and a picnic are in order.

Ngardmau waterfall, flowing from Mt Ngerchelchuus, is the tallest waterfall in Micronesia. It makes for a tough but rewarding hike, as you trek alongside the wartime Japanese railway and also pass through traditional villages and taro patches. A dip in the pools at the base of the falls is not to be missed.

Ngaraard State

Ngaraard has villages on both its east and west coasts, with a road connecting them. Some of Babeldaob's prettiest **beaches** are on Ngaraard's east coast, and although the state has only 600 people, that's enough to make it Babeldaob's third most populated state (after Airai and Ngarchelong).

Ngarchelong State

Ngarchelong, at Babeldaob's northernmost point, has an open field with rows of **basalt monoliths** known as Badrulchau. Their origin and purpose is unknown, but according to one legend the gods put them there to support a **bai** that held thousands of people. There are 37 stones in all, some weighing up to five tonnes.

Many of Babeldaob's hillsides were once elaborately terraced into steps and pyramids, and some terraces can still be seen. Archaeological research suggests that construction probably began around AD 100 and was abandoned around 1600. Quite mysteriously, few villages seem to have been located close to these terraced hillsides, Badrulchau being the only known exception.

Ngarchelong is also home to some very baffling **stone faces**, similar to those found on Easter Island.

ACTIVITIES & TOURS

If you enjoy seclusion, find a guide to take you to Ngeremeduu Bay, Micronesia's largest estuary, where kayaking is good on

rivers feeding into the bay. There will also be the chance to see birds, mangroves and the occasional crocodile.

Fish 'N Fins (☎ 488 2637; www.fishnfins.com; Koror) 4WD land tours US\$150.

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Big Island tour adult/child US\$90/55, minimum of two people; Ngardmau waterfall and hiking tour adult/child US\$95/65, minimum of two people.

Mami Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mami-divers.com; Koror) Waterfall tour US\$95.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (Map p399; ☎ 488 1755; www.necomarine.com; Malakal) Full-day 'Babeldaob Adventure' tour US\$145. Takes in the island's monoliths, *bai*, terraced hillsides and waterfalls.

North Beach Cottages (☎ 824 4444; www.northbeachcottages.com; Ngaraard) Offers a variety of car tours. Ngardmau waterfall US\$50; Ngarchelong monoliths and stone faces US\$10 per person.

Sam's Dive Tours (Map p399; ☎ 488 1062; www.sams-tours.com; Malakal) Babeldaob tour including waterfalls US\$150.

SLEEPING

To camp you'll need to first obtain permission from the village chief. You can camp on site at the North Beach Cottages for US\$25 (see below).

Airai View Hotel (☎ 587 3530; www.airaiview.com; Babeldaob; deluxe/ocean view r US\$95/110; ☎ ☎) Old-fashioned character is the score: rich mahogany floors, a grand lobby decorated with the island's largest storyboard, a balcony restaurant and a piano bar. Standard rooms are plain yet elegant, with two double beds and wooden furniture; deluxe rooms have huge balconies looking across the jungle towards the ocean. It's on the road between Koror and the airport.

Melekeok Guesthouses (☎ 654 1001; Melekeok; r US\$40) Lovely and spacious, these three guesthouses sit side by side, constructed from beautiful dark wood, with 24-hour electricity, hot-water showers and good kitchen facilities. Local meals are available and transportation can be arranged.

North Beach Cottages (☎ 824 4444; www.northbeachcottages.com; Ngaraard; cottages US\$120; ☎ ☎) These four Palauan-style cottages are a winner, set on a lovely white-sand beach. They're made of local mahogany and set in lush greenery. There's even a bar and restaurant that serves terrific meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$6/8/12) using local ingredients, plus a gift shop and a store.

Also:

Maria's Homestay (☎ 622 1086; Ngchesar, PO Box 6025, Koror; per person US\$25)

Patrick's Homestay (☎ 622 1067; Ngchesar, PO Box 1067, Koror; per person US\$25)

Reef Side View Lodge (☎ 824 1066, 824 2975; emilytkel@yahoo.com; Ngaraard; r from US\$55) Rooms on the beach front with balcony, cable TV, VCR, kitchenette and telephone.

PELELIU

pop 600 / area 13 sq km

Peleliu is peaceful and laid-back. There's not much to do and that's entirely the charm, for you can really *hear* the silence. Often it will seem like you've got the entire island all to yourself (you might not spot another tourist during your entire stay, and maybe not even a local, if you walk far enough). It's a lovely little place, and that's why it's so hard to imagine it torn apart by war. Yet during 1944 Peleliu was the site of one of the bloodiest battles of WWII (see the boxed text, below). Although the island is only 13 sq km, in two months over 15,000 men were killed here, almost equalling Palau's current population. Peleliu's forests were also bombed and burned to the ground.

Today there's no immediate sense of war at all, save for the unearthly sensation engendered by an encounter with an eerie, rusted

pillbox or tank in the jungle's secondary growth. Even then, the experience is leavened by the whistles and songs of tropical birds thriving in the regenerated vines and leafy foliage, a cornucopia that has mostly healed the hideous battle scars of old.

TRANSPORT

The state boat *Peleliu Islander*, with a 30-passenger capacity, runs between Elochel Dock in Klouklubed and the Fisheries Co-op on Koror (US\$6, three hours), usually leaving Koror at 2pm on Monday and Friday and returning from Peleliu at noon on Thursday and Sunday. Reservations aren't necessary but departure times can change, so you should call the Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) for verification.

Going by boat is highly recommended – not only will you encounter curious (but friendly) locals who will be wondering what the hell you're doing so far off the beaten track, you'll also share the ride with as many chickens, roosters and wide-eyed kids as can be crammed on board. Bring your sea legs – the waters can be rough.

Private speedboats sometimes operate; ask around at Koror's Fisheries Co-op.

Belau Air flies from Koror to Peleliu (one way/return US\$50/90; see p399 for details).

In a day you could do maybe half of Peleliu on foot, as the coral and concrete roads

MASS COFFINS: THE BATTLE FOR PELELIU

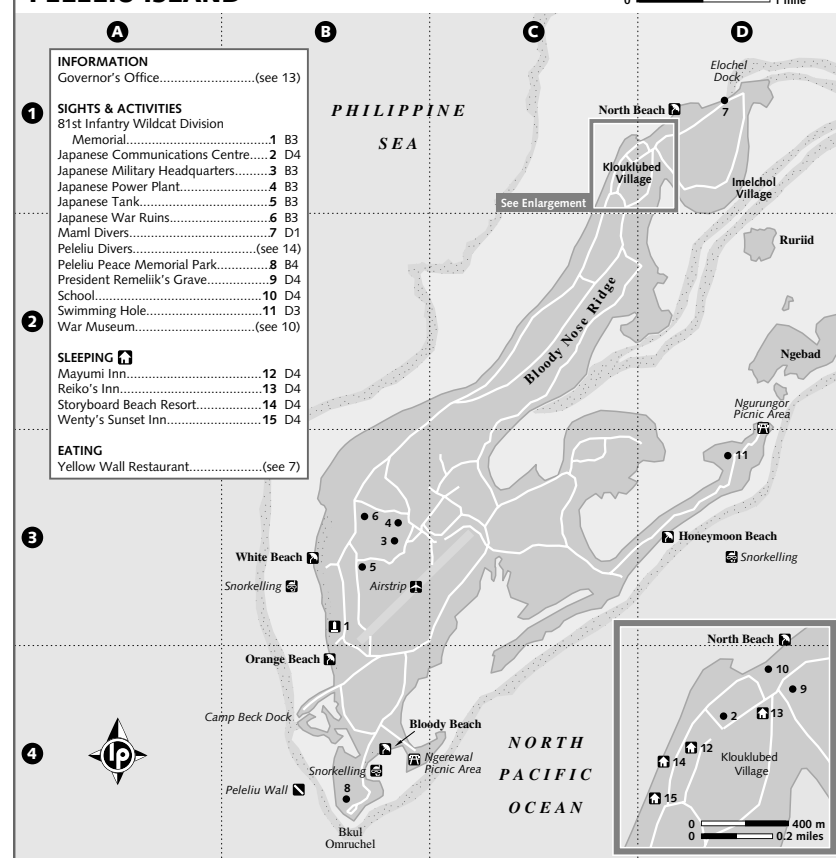
The battle for Peleliu was conceived by US military tacticians who were worried that Japanese attacks from bases in Peleliu and Angaur might prevent a successful retaking of the Philippines. By mid-1944, however, US air bombings had reduced Peleliu to a negligible threat and it could easily have been bypassed, as were many other islands held by the Japanese. Instead, Peleliu was captured at a terrible, unanticipated cost, with more than 8000 US casualties.

At the time of the US invasion, some 10,000 Japanese soldiers were holed up in the caves that honeycombed Peleliu's jagged limestone ridges. Their goal was not to win, but to stall defeat. Far away from the beaches and the reach of naval bombardment, the Japanese tenaciously defended these caves to their deaths. In the bloody assaults that followed, the caves became mass coffins as American troops used flamethrowers, grenades and explosives to seal them shut.

Rather than the expected quick victory, it took 2½ months for the Americans to rout out the last of the Japanese forces. In the end only 400 prisoners were taken alive and the majority of those were Korean labourers.

In the late 1950s, a Japanese straggler who had been hiding in the jungle was discovered by an elderly woman as he entered her garden. Crouching low to see who had been stealing her tapioca, the woman froze and then screamed, thinking she was seeing a ghost. The man's uniform was torn to shreds, his hair matted and teeth streaked black. Police from Koror hunted down the straggler, bound him with rope and paraded him around for everyone to see. In that inglorious manner, the last WWII soldier left Peleliu.

PELELIU ISLAND



are in good condition. A bicycle is a fine idea; your accommodation can help you find one (they might be able to rent you a car, too, if you really must). The island still has a scattering of live ammunition, so take care if you go off the beaten path and refrain from taking any 'souvenirs', no matter how small or insignificant they may seem – there's a US\$15,000 fine for the removal of war relics (or your life if you take an unexploded bomb).

SIGHTS Klouklubed

Palau's first president, the assassinated Haruo Remeliik, was from Peleliu; his **grave** is directly opposite the governor's office.

Klouklubed's small **war museum** contains war artefacts, munitions and period photos. There's a multistorey, bombed-out **Japanese communications centre** right in the middle of the village, tangled with vegetation and encircled by homes.

Heading towards the dock you can spot a **cave** and **pillbox** on the right, opposite a sandy beach.

Japanese War Ruins

Heading south, just before you come to White Beach, you'll see the ruins of a **Japanese war building** to your left. Just past there, from the main road, turn inland and follow the dirt road until you come to a tiny, rusted Japanese **tank**; it's hard to believe

Japan defended the island so tenaciously with these tiny contraptions at their disposal. To the left, heading east, another dirt path leads you to the ruins of the **Japanese power plant and military headquarters** – if you don't believe in ghosts, you might be forced to revise your opinion after a visit here. With stairs that lead nowhere, pockmarked ceilings, and exposed wires and girders forming uncanny shadows on the green, slimy walls, the headquarters in particular impart the freaky feeling that you're being watched.

Orange Beach

The first US invasion forces to land on Peleliu came ashore at Orange Beach on 15 September 1944. From concrete pillboxes the Japanese machine-gunned the oncoming waves of Americans as they hit the beaches. Despite the barrage, about 15,000 US soldiers made it ashore that first day.

Today Orange Beach is a quiet picnic spot with a sandy beach and waters that are calm and clear. Just before the beach there are two grey **coral monuments** with plaques dedicated to the US Army's 81st Infantry Wildcat Division. On the beach, look to the south to see a Japanese **defence bunker** partially concealed by the rocks.

Camp Beck Dock

Behind Camp Beck Dock, where the water is a creamy aqua, you'll find a huge pile of mangled WWII plane engines, cockpits, pipes, tubing, fuselages, anchors and who knows what, all compacted into blocks of twisted aluminium and steel and overgrown with jungle.

South Beaches

At Bkul Omruchel, on the southwest tip of the island, the Japanese have constructed half-a-dozen chunky concrete tables and named the area **Peleliu Peace Memorial Park**. From here you can see to the south, and when the surf crashes, there are some small blowholes that erupt near the shore.

Despite its name, **Bloody Beach** is a calm circular cove with a nice sandy beach. Just to the north is the Ngerewal picnic area.

Northeast of the airport is **Honeymoon Beach**, a long stretch of beach with good seasonal surf. At the eastern tip of this stretch is the **Ngurungor picnic area**, which has some

mangroves and tiny rock island formations just offshore.

Heading back from Ngurungor, off a grassy road to the right, there's a refreshing little **swimming hole** of half-salt, half-fresh water that bobs up and down with the tides. A metal ladder hangs down the side of the tiny pit, but local kids just jump in from the top.

ACTIVITIES

Divng & Snorkelling

The Peleliu Wall, southwest of Peleliu, is one of the world's finest dives – an abrupt 300m drop that starts in about 3m of water. It's a veritable treasure trove of sharks, hawksbill sea turtles, black coral trees, mammoth gorgonian fans and an amazing variety of fish.

Both White Beach and Bloody Beach have coral and good snorkelling; Honey-moon Beach is also good for snorkelling.

DIVE SHOPS

Many of Palau's best dive spots are closer to Peleliu than Koror, but most people start out from Koror with one of the dive shops based there (see p406).

Maml Divers (☎ 345 1652; www.mamldivers.com; Peleliu) Two-tank dives US\$80, additional dives US\$40; snorkelling tours US\$45, lunch included.

Peleliu Divers (☎ 345 1058; pdivers@palaunet.com; Peleliu) Two-tank dives US\$90, lunch included.

TOURS

Tangie Hesus gives an excellent tour of the island (US\$80 for one to four people, US\$15 per person); he's a friendly, indefatigable character and Peleliu's resident historian of sorts. Tangie can generally be reached at the **Mayumi Inn** (☎ 345 1036).

Peleliu Divers and Maml Divers (above) both do land tours (US\$30).

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) runs a Peleliu Island historical tour (adult/child US\$120/90), with a minimum of three people.

SLEEPING

Camping

Camping is easy, as some of the beach picnic sites have open-air shelters, tables, barbecue pits and outhouses, but you'll need to take drinking water with you. You'll also need a close-knit screened tent or insect

repellent. While no permission is required to camp, you should first check in at the helpful governor's office. You can arrange for a car to drop you off at your camping site and to pick you up later.

Ngurungor picnic area is a good choice for camping. It's close to the swimming hole and it usually has a refreshing breeze. Orange Beach is another possibility, though it can be hot and muggy. Honey-moon Beach, with covered picnic tables, is also a nice spot, but beware the bitey sand gnats.

Guesthouses

No credit cards are accepted on Peleliu, so bring enough cash and travellers cheques.

Storyboard Beach Resort (☎ 345 1019; pdivers@palaunet.com; cottages US\$85) Six simple but pleasant A-frame concrete cottages on the beach, with hot showers, screened windows, *lanai* (verandas) and ceiling fans; rustic and peaceful. Some cottages have queen-size beds, others have twin beds. Breakfast can be prepared for US\$6 and dinner for US\$12.

Also:

Mayumi Inn (☎ 345 1036; Peleliu; per person US\$22; ☎) Ten plain rooms behind Keibo's Store with a shared outdoor bathroom. Tasty meals available (US\$12).

Reiko's Inn (☎ 345 1106; per person US\$25) Near the governor's office.

Wenty's Sunset Inn (☎ 345 1080; Peleliu; per person US\$15) Little guesthouse alongside a nice beach with five rooms, each with a double bed.

EATING

Yellow Wall Restaurant (☎ 345 1652; mains US\$7-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by Maml Divers, this is Peleliu's only restaurant, such as it is (it's more like a tiny café). It serves good local seafood including mangrove crab and fruit-bat pie, as well as Korean, Filipino and Japanese fare.

ANGAUR

pop 200 / area 8 sq km

Serene, low-key Angaur Island, garnished with a goodly dollop of timeless South Seas charm, has plenty to offer isolationists. Eleven kilometres southwest of Peleliu, the island is outside the protective reef that surrounds the majority of Palau's islands:

MONKEY ISLAND?

Never mind the people, what are the monkeys like? Yes, that's right – Angaur has thousands of crab-eating macaques, descendants of a couple of monkeys brought to the island by Germans in the early 1900s on a suicide mission: to monitor air quality in Angaur's phosphate mines. When accidentally released (escaped?), the monkeys took well to Angaur's jungle despite attempts to eradicate them. Because they occasionally raid crops and eat crabs, Palauans consider them a pest and despite recent bounties being placed on them, they still – somehow – thrive.

open ocean pounds the north coast, where the sea explodes skyward through a series of small blowholes; the southern end is much calmer and fringed with sandy beaches.

TRANSPORT

The 25-passenger state boat *Yamato Maru* makes the three-hour trip (adult/child US\$5/3) from Koror's Fisheries Co-op on Friday and Monday and back to Koror on Thursday and Sunday. Call the Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) for sailing schedules.

Private speedboats sometimes do the trip but not nearly as often as between Koror and Peleliu, as the channel between Angaur and Koror gets very rough.

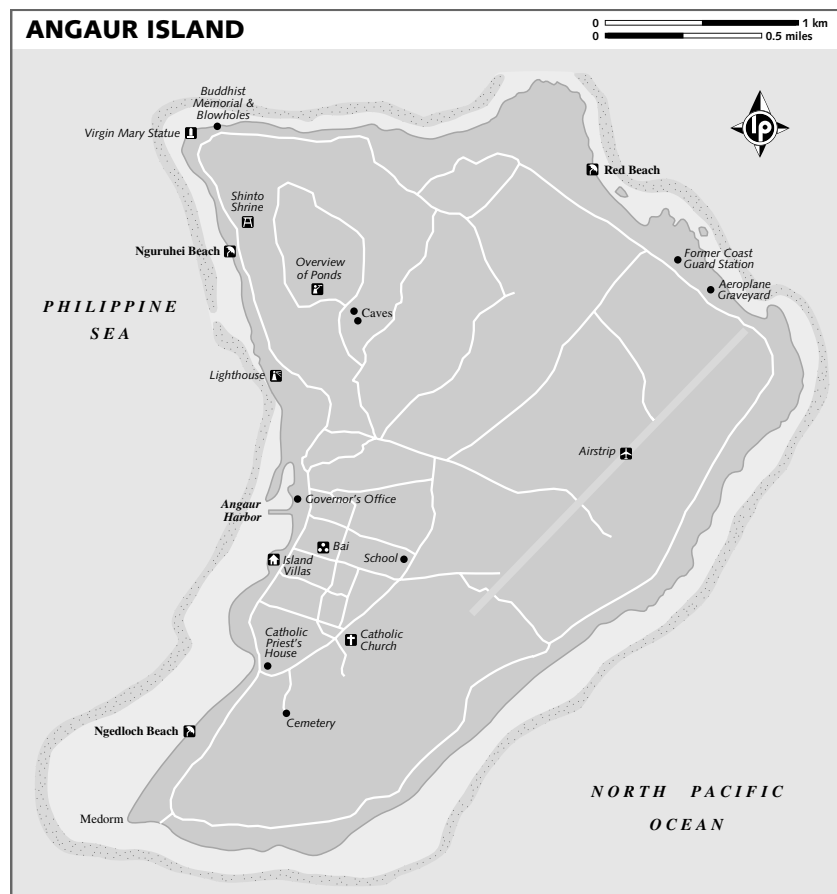
Belau Air flies from Koror to Angaur (one way/return US\$50/90); see p399 for details.

The coastal road circling Angaur is mostly level and in good condition. Angaur is just 4km long, so you can bust out the shoe leather with impunity.

Island Villas (see p414) can arrange car rentals, bicycle hire and sometimes mopeds, which are a good deal given that Angaur is flat.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

You can walk the coastal road in a day, if the heat and humidity doesn't take its toll. You might bump into some monkeys, too. Outside Angaur's one village, tall trees and tropical growth close in, allowing for shady strolls.



There are half-submerged US tanks in the harbour and blowholes to the north. In the northeast, you might come across some WWII aircraft wrecks, overgrown with jungle.

There's good diving to enjoy around Angaur between January and July; the water is too rough at other times. There are no diving facilities on Angaur, so make advance arrangements in Koror; turn to p406 for a list of operators (although the dive companies only occasionally go to Angaur).

Island Villas organises guided land tours (US\$75) for up to four people; the company also arranges snorkelling and fishing tours.

SLEEPING & EATING

Most of Angaur's coastal areas are privately owned so you'll need to seek permission from landowners. **Belau Air** (☎ 587 8090) can arrange this for you.

Island Villas (☎ 277 1111; islandvillas@palaunet.com; s/d US\$25/35) Five rooms in a spacious, modern house on the beach with a kitchen, ocean-view deck and a couple of other rooms capable of accommodating larger groups. Serves meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$8/10/15).

OK's Motel (☎ 277 1006; okasiano@yahoo.com; r US\$15) A few rooms with shared bathroom; meals are available (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$5/8/12).

Angaur has a couple of small stores with basic provisions, but no restaurants.

KAYANGEL

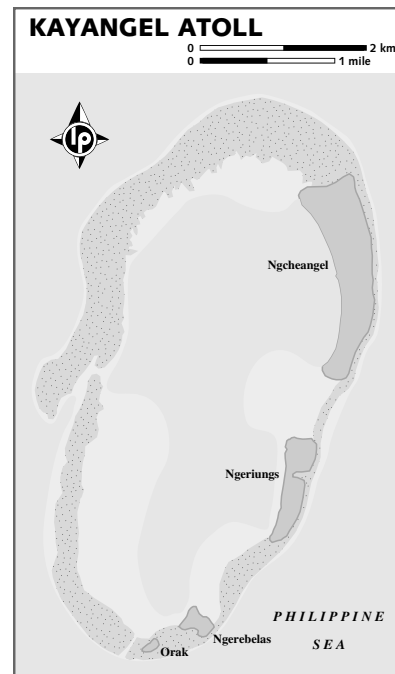
pop 137 / area 3 sq km

This picture-postcard coral atoll, 24km north of Babeldaob, consists of four islands fringed with sun-bleached beaches and a beautiful aqua lagoon. The main island, Ngcheangel, is barely 2.4km long and takes only a few minutes to walk across, yet there are two chiefs – one governing the north and a stronger chief controlling the south.

Kayangel has just one quiet village of 41 houses, a couple of small stores, a little ice-making plant and a few mopeds. This rustic charm might not last much longer, though; there are rumblings about turning Kayangel into a major Palauan tourist attraction.

Kayangel is fairly traditional and welcomes culturally sensitive visitors: women should wear a T-shirt and shorts over their bathing suit when swimming and no-one should wear shorts in the village.

Woven handbags and baskets from Kayangel are in demand as they're made of a high-quality pandanus leaf.



Contact the **Kayangel governor's office** (☎ in Kayangel 876 2967, in Koror 488 2766) about camping or staying with a family. Take rice, coffee, betel nut, baked goods or other provisions as gifts.

Operators occasionally bring divers to Kayangel for the virgin reefs and the chance to get way, way off the beaten path; check with the dive companies listed on p406.

The state speedboat leaves Kayangel for Koror every second Friday and returns to Kayangel from Koror's T-Dock the following Sunday (US\$20, two hours). Private speedboats, if you can find them, take about three hours.

You need a permit to visit Kayangel, obtainable from the governor's office.

SOUTH-WEST ISLANDS

The South-West group consists of half a dozen small islands: Sonsorol (population between 25 and 64; people migrate with visiting ships) and Fana (uninhabited) – collectively known as the Sonsorol Islands; plus Pulo Anna (population 18), Merir (population 5), Tobi (population 25) and Helen (uninhabited). The group is scattered 595km beyond Koror and 161km north of Indonesia; each island covers less than 2.5 sq km.

The Japanese used the islands for phosphate mining during their occupation, so they were once heavily populated. While Fana has remained uninhabited since WWII, the Sonsorolese visit it to fish and capture coconut crabs, turtles and birds.

Uninhabited Helen Island has nesting lesser-crested terns and green sea turtles; South-West Islanders have long sailed to Helen Reef to hunt the turtles and harvest giant clams, as do occasional government supply ships and illegal Indonesian poachers. Merir Island also has nesting green sea turtles.

South-West Islanders have more in common with Yapeese and Chuukese outer islanders than with Palauans from the main Palauan islands. Unsurprisingly, the lifestyle in this part of the world is very traditional: thatched houses, carved canoes and a fishing-based livelihood complete the scene.

Other than the occasional researcher, there are virtually no foreign visitors to the islands, but those that do make the journey

find that the people are friendly and most speak some English.

There are no guesthouses here but it is possible to camp, although you should avoid Merir, with its dire mosquito infestation. Naturally, you'll need to bring all your own food and supplies.

The Sonsorol state boat visits Sonso-rol every second month; the 23-hour ride from Koror is free of charge. The Tobi state boat (return US\$19.50) also chugs along to Tobi and Helen every two months, more frequently if needed, and sometimes goes to other islands. Research vessels and a Palauan fishing patrol boat occasionally make their way to the islands. Contact the **Sonsorol governor's office** (☎ 488 1237) and the **Tobi governor's office** (☎ 488 2218) in Koror for further information.

PALAU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Palau has a good spread of accommodation to suit all budgets; add 10% tax onto all room prices.

The smaller hotels generally provide free airport transfers upon request.

Many hotels have good package deals with the local dive companies; contact the hotels or dive companies for details.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Palau is at the top of many divers' lists; it's simply spectacular, as any wet-suited fool will tell you. Most of the places listed on p406 conduct PADI courses; a Discover Scuba course costs around US\$195.

Kayaking

The Rock Islands are the exemplar; again, see p406 for information.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses stay open weekdays from 8am to 5pm. Banking hours are (conservatively) 9.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Thursday and to 5pm on Friday.

CHILDREN

Palau is not really a family destination. There's nowhere specifically kiddie-orientated in Koror, and trekking around

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Palau Horizon* is published every Tuesday and Friday, and the *Tia Belau* every Friday.
- Palau has one TV station, as well as one short wave, one AM and four FM radio stations. Palau receives US cable TV.
- The video format is NTSC.
- Electricity is supplied at 110V, 60 Hz AC. Outlets use flat two-pin plugs.
- Palau uses the imperial system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

inaccessible Babeldaob with the little tackers in tow doesn't sound too appealing. The good news for those travelling with ankle biters is that there's a big shopping centre in Koror, the **WCTC Shopping Center Mall** (Map p400; ☎ 488 1633, 488 2394; Koror), where you're sure to find baby formulas and maybe a toy or two to keep older children occupied.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Palauan Embassies & Consulates

Guam (☎ 671-646 9281; 540 Marine Dr, ITC Bldg, Tamuning) Consulate.

Japan (☎ 03-3354 5500; 2nd fl, 201 Pare Cristal, 1-2 Katamachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-001) Embassy.

Taiwan (☎ 02-2561 1580; 2nd fl – B, 100 Nanking East Rd, Sec 2, Taipei) Embassy.

USA (☎ 202-452 6814; 2000 L St, NW, Suite 407, Washington DC) Embassy.

Embassies & Consulates in Palau

USA (Map p399; ☎ 488 2920; Topside, Koror)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Youth Day (15 March) Concerts and sports.

Earth Day (22 April) Activities promoting environmental issues and 'green' awareness.

Senior Citizens Day (5 May) Parades, floats, handicrafts and dancing.

Constitution Day (9 July)

Olechotel Belau Fair (9 July) Celebration of Palauan culture with arts and crafts, exhibits, cooking and dancing.

Independence Day (1 October) Commemoration of Palau's Day of Independence in 1994 with feasts, parades and the enduringly popular Miss Palau contest.

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper:** 50c
- **Coffee:** US\$1.50
- **Taxi ride from the airport to central Koror:** US\$20
- **Car hire:** from US\$40 per day
- **Land tour:** US\$90

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon petrol:** US\$3
- **1L bottled water:** 80c
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** 60c
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$25
- **Hamburger:** US\$2.50

HOLIDAYS

See p829 for details of public holidays in the Pacific region.

INTERNET ACCESS

Palauan Internet connections are the slowest known to man or beast – you have been warned. Costs hover around US\$4 an hour at an Internet café.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Consult the **Palau Visitors Authority** (www.visit-palau.com).

MONEY

Palau's currency is the US dollar (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). Credit cards are widely accepted in Koror State but not at all in the smaller islands. ATMs are similarly found in Koror but not elsewhere. Tipping is not expected.

TELEPHONE

International phone calls can be made 24 hours from the Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC) office in central Koror. Palau's international telephone code is ☎ 680; there are no area codes. Debusch phone cards are widely available in US\$10, US\$15, US\$25, US\$50 and US\$100 denominations.

TIME

Koror is nine hours ahead of UTC/GMT.

VISAS

All tourists may visit Palau for 30 days without requiring a visa. The visa can be extended for two 30-day periods (US\$100 per extension) if an application is made no more than seven days after expiration.

TRANSPORT IN PALAU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

All flights arrive at the Palau International Airport.

Continental (Palau ☎ 488 2448, 488 1029; www.continental.com) flies daily from Houston (Texas) via Honolulu (Hawaii) to Guam, with connections to Palau. Daily flights from Honolulu to Guam also have daily connections to Palau. Direct flights from Houston to Tokyo connect to Guam and Palau. There are flights from Manila to Palau on Wednesday and Saturday.

Far Eastern Air Transport (Palau ☎ 488 3931; www.fat.com.tw) flies from Taipei (Taiwan) to Palau on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

Sea

Visiting yachts should notify the **harbour master** (☎ 488 5789) before arrival. Yachts moor at Malakal Harbor and at M-Dock.

GETTING AROUND

There's no public transport, but if you choose to walk someone will invariably give you a lift. A small tip is expected.

Air

Belau Air (☎ 587 8090; www.gecpalau.com/belauair.htm) flies from Koror to Angaur and Peleliu on Thursday, Friday and Sunday (one way/return US\$50/90).

Boat

Many Palauans commute between islands in private speedboats; you can often hitch a ride by contributing to fuel costs. State-owned boats also travel between their home

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a departure tax of US\$20 when you fly out of Palau.

island and Koror. See the relevant island sections for details.

Car

Cars are generally left-hand drive.

DRIVING LICENCE

You can drive for up to 30 days with a current licence from your home country.

HIRE

Most car-hire agencies are in Koror State (see p399). It's possible to rent a vehicle on the other islands, though you will need

to do this either privately or through your accommodation.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Watch out for potholes and unmarked speed bumps as you drive. If you're venturing deep into Babeldaob, rent a high-riding vehicle that will be able to handle the bumps.

ROAD RULES

The maximum speed limit is 40km/h (25mph). Cars drive on the right-hand side of the road.

Pitcairn Island

You've probably heard of Pitcairn for all the wrong reasons. Until a few years ago, this tiny island group in the middle of the Pacific Ocean lived off its reputation as the idyllic hideaway settlement for the *Bounty* mutineers, but then came the child sex trial which changed Pitcairn Island forever.

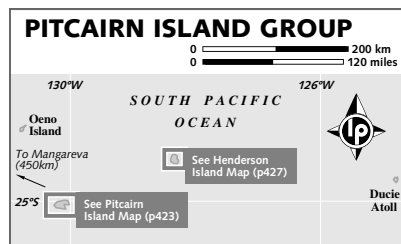
Beautifully green and lush, with a population you could easily seat in a school bus, Pitcairn is one of the last remnants of the British Empire. It's also one of the most remote places on earth, lying halfway between New Zealand (NZ) and Peru. The nearest inhabited island is Mangareva in French Polynesia, a 30-hour boat trip away.

The Pitcairn group includes two low-lying atolls, Oeno and Ducie, and the World Heritage-listed Henderson Island – a *makatea* (raised coral island) with a virtually untouched environment and endemic birdlife.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savour that first image of **Pitcairn Island** (p422) as it comes into view – life may never be this remote again
- Explore Pitcairn's new **museum** (p426), with its reminders of the island's *Bounty* history
- Comb the beach of **Ducie Atoll** (p428) and its amazing collection of flotsam
- Dream about travelling to **Henderson Island** (p427), a virtually untouched piece of the Pacific
- Inspect Polynesian **petroglyphs** (p426), reminders of Pitcairn Island's pre-European history, carved into the rocks at Down Rope





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Pitcairn's climate is mild and equable, with mean monthly temperatures varying from 19°C in August to 24°C in February. The lowest temperature ever recorded was 10°C; the highest, 34°C. Annual rainfall (around 2000mm) is spread unevenly, but July and August are usually the driest months and November the wettest.

Visitors don't usually have too much choice about when to go to Pitcairn – they go when they've found a yacht, cargo ship or cruise ship heading that way.

HISTORY

The islands of the Pitcairn group have always had a close connection with Mangareva in the Gambier Archipelago (p665), and at one time a Polynesian trading triangle operated between Mangareva, Pitcairn and Henderson. Mangareva's lagoon had abundant supplies of black-lipped pearl oyster shells, which made fine scrapers or scoops and could be cut to make fish hooks. Pitcairn had the only quarry in this part of Polynesia where flakes could be chipped off the sharp-edged stones to make adzes

and other tools. Inhospitable Henderson Island's small population supplied red tropicbird feathers, green turtles and other 'luxury' goods.

Overpopulation devastated Mangareva, and deforestation removed the trees used for making the great seagoing canoes. In a classic example of the flow-on effect of ecological disasters, the downfall of Mangareva led to the abandonment of both Henderson and Pitcairn.

When the explorer Pedro Fernández de Quirós chanced upon Henderson Island in 1606 it was uninhabited, and presumably Pitcairn Island had also been evacuated.

The four Pitcairn islands would probably have been annexed by the French, along with the Tuamotu and Gambier islands, were it not for the British settlement founded by the *Bounty* mutineers. For more on Pitcairn Island's history, see p422; for Henderson Island's history, see p428.

The Pitcairn Island group is Britain's last overseas territory in the Pacific. The governor, who is also the British high commissioner to NZ, lives in Wellington. Prior to the sex trial (see opposite), the island was governed at arm's length. The governor now has a representative in residence, and has visited Pitcairn personally. At a local level, the Island Council consists of a mayor plus appointed and elected members, and tends to local matters including island maintenance, shipping arrivals, communications and medical services.

THE CULTURE

Pitcairn's nine families are descendants of the original *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian companions, plus other arrivals over the years. *Bounty* family names, such as Christian and Young, are still common. The island's extraordinarily remote nature means Pitcairners have forged a distinct language and culture over the past two centuries. However, aspects of their way of life have come under international scrutiny since the 2004 sex trial, and it remains to be seen whether the island can sustain itself with a population of just 44 – half the number considered necessary to remain viable.

Self-reliance is a way of life on Pitcairn, as contact with the outside world is limited to visiting yachts, the few cargo ships

PITCAIRN'S FUTURE?

Only inhabitants of Mars would have failed to have picked up on Pitcairn in the last few years. The tiny island hit world headlines due to the ongoing drama of 13 men charged with a string of sex offences, including rape and indecent assault, on girls as young as 12. Some charges dated back 40 years.

In October 2004 six of them men, including then mayor Steve Christian, were found guilty of some 55 charges; one man was acquitted. The six received sentences ranging from community service to six years' jail. At the time of writing, six other men, all living in NZ or Australia, had yet to face court. A series of appeals means the story is far from closed.

At the time of writing, the next chapter was set to unfold in April 2006. The Privy Council in London, the highest appellate body for British overseas territories, will hear the men's claim that, as Pitcairn does not fall within British jurisdiction, Britain had no right to stage the trial. Defence lawyers will argue that when Fletcher Christian and his band of mutineers burnt the *Bounty* in 1790, they rebelled against Britain and severed all ties. A previous appeal, rejected by the Pitcairn Supreme Court sitting in NZ, saw defence lawyers arguing that English law was never enforced on Pitcairn and thus locals weren't aware that rape was a serious offence. Another legal challenge launched in November 2005 questioned the British Government's decision to appoint NZ judges and lawyers to put Pitcairn Islanders on trial.

It may be a long time before the watchful eyes of the world will know the final outcome. In the meantime, life on Pitcairn has changed irrevocably. The community has been fractured, and it will be interesting to see how the locals deal with that division in the future. Outsiders inundated the island during the trial, outnumbering the local adult population for the first time in Pitcairn's history. The island now has

two permanent police officers plus a purpose-built six-cell jail, constructed by the men it may one day incarcerate. Prison guards will be sent to Pitcairn if the convicted men are jailed following the appeals. Social workers from NZ will move to the island to educate the community about sexual abuse and its prevention, and a handful of infrastructure projects have commenced to help the island survive, should a large section of its able-bodied male population eventually be jailed. These projects are also designed to make Pitcairn economically viable and to encourage Pitcairners resident overseas (mainly in NZ and Australia) to move back home. Pitcairn Commissioner Leslie Jacques has stated that the aim is to lift the population to 100.

During 2005 the British Government injected £1.9 million into its last Pacific colony, enabling the building of a new jetty and a pristine museum, plus the sealing of the island's main access road. A breakwater is planned, and funding has been approved to establish wind power to provide 24-hour electricity; at present, the island's generator is turned on for just 10 hours per day. Satellite connections to every home have been promised. Apiculture (bee keeping) has been under way for quite some time, and the island's honey is revered as one of the world's purest. The plan is to boost annual production to 20,000 jars. The island has a new medical centre, a doctor, and even a dentist's chair. Should the Privy Council overturn the men's convictions, the jail may well become an eco-tourist lodge. But the biggest change – if it goes ahead – is talk of building an airstrip.

Time will tell whether these projects will put the island back into profit and, in so doing, draw Pitcairners back to their tiny island. Certainly, some locals fear for the future of their home, but others see the events of the last few years as a new beginning.

that can be persuaded to stop and the occasional cruise ship. So when the longboats (see p426) crash through the Pacific waves from Bounty Bay to rendezvous with visiting ships, everyone's at quayside to help unload. Although essentially self-sufficient for food, the islanders supplement their diet with imported foods from NZ, goods which may take three to six months to arrive.

This is not the kind of place you can dial a pizza delivery. It's also not somewhere you can go it alone – community spirit is all-important. From manning the longboats to harvesting food, the islanders rely on each other for everything. It's only by sticking together that Pitcairners have survived on this isolated outpost for so long. This attitude could explain some of the controversy

PITCAIRN ISLAND FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Adamstown (Pitcairn)
- **Population:** 44
- **Land area:** 4.5 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Four
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 872
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** English and Pitkern
- **Greeting:** Hello
- **Website:** www.government.pn

surrounding the sex abuse trial – where mothers, wives, sisters and daughters defended their men's actions, saying it was customary for girls on the island to have sex at 12 and that it was consensual.

Farming, fishing for shark and shooting breadfruit from trees are everyday activities for much of the community, as are fixing machinery and homes. Some islanders hold government jobs, though most income is derived from selling the island's famous stamps to collectors, selling its domain name (.pn) and honey, and producing curios such as woodcarvings and woven baskets to sell to passengers on passing ships (and by mail order at www.lareau.org/pitc mall.html).

RELIGION

In 1887 a Seventh-Day Adventist missionary from the US converted the whole island, so Saturday is observed as the Sabbath, alcohol is ostensibly banned (although that ban has been relaxed in recent years and locals may now obtain a six-month license to purchase alcohol), there's no dancing and the islanders are not supposed to eat pork (that ban can be a bit loose as well) or fish that do not have scales (the island's supply of lobsters are used for bait!).

LANGUAGE

Pitcairners communicate quite happily in English but among themselves lapse into Pitkern (18th-century seafaring English spiced with Polynesian words). So when Pitcairners go out to shoot goats they do it with *muskets*, the goats end up as *wekle* (victuals) and houses have a *deck*. If a Pitcairn party consumes too much of that banned beverage, it's possible that *all hands* (everyone) may *capsize* (fall over).

ENVIRONMENT

The four islands of the Pitcairn group, essentially outliers of the Tuamotu and Gambier islands of French Polynesia, comprise 43 sq km of land scattered over a vast tract of ocean; it's more than 600km from Oeno Island in the west to Ducie Atoll in the east.

Tiny Pitcairn is a high island – the tip of a mountain rising out of the sea – with an intermittent fringing reef. Unlike many Pacific islands, this very fertile lump of

rock has no beaches to speak of; instead, it has dramatic cliffs, which have been the downfall of more than one islander (see the boxed text, p427).

Oeno and Ducie are classic atolls, a scattering of low-lying sandy islets on a coral reef fringing a central lagoon. Henderson, the largest island in the group, is a *makatea* island, an ancient coral reef pushed up above sea level by geological forces.

PITCAIRN ISLAND

pop 44 / area 4.5 sq km

This small, fertile island rising precipitously from the surrounding sea is so tied up with the *Bounty* story that it's easy to overlook the fact that, although it was uninhabited when the mutineers showed up in January 1790, it had been settled by Polynesians in the past.

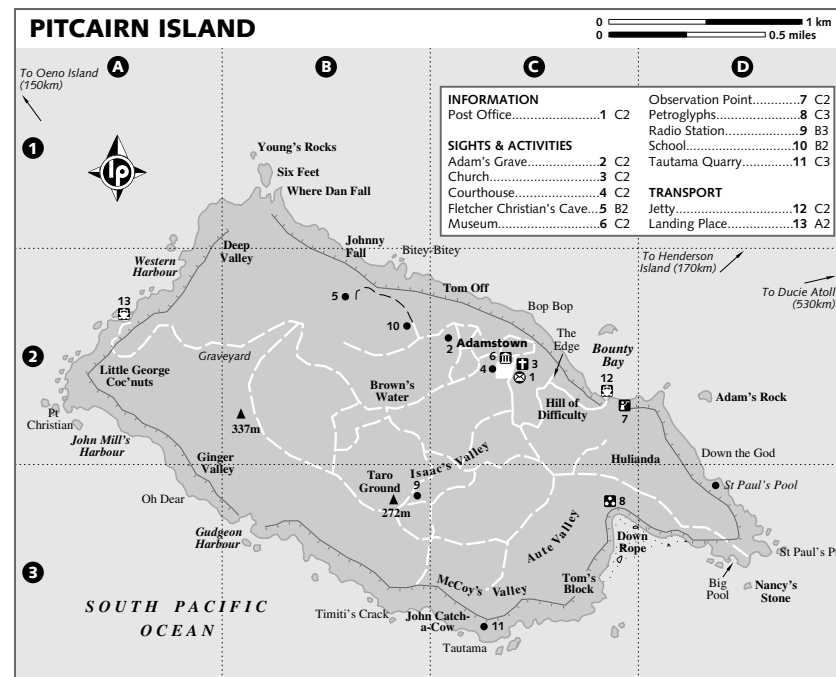
The island's curious array of place names (see the boxed text, p427) confronts the visitor immediately on arrival at Bounty Bay's newly restored jetty. The accurately named Hill of Difficulty is the steep trail that leads up to the island's only settlement, Adamstown; in 2005 this mud track made history by becoming Pitcairn's first paved road. Adamstown is perched 120m above the sea on the Edge. Houses here are either 'upside' or 'downside' of the main road through the small settlement.

HISTORY

It is believed there was a Polynesian settlement on the island between the 12th and 15th centuries, and perhaps an earlier settlement as many as 2000 years before that. As the mutineers were to prove, small though it was, Pitcairn provided all the basic necessities of life.

In 1767 Philip Carteret sailed by on HMS *Swallow* and named the island after Major Pitcairn of the marines. Finding it was one thing – Carteret was unable to land and his mischarting of the island by 300km made relocating it a problem.

In January 1790 the *Bounty* mutineers arrived on inhospitable Pitcairn after a long search for a remote hideaway, far from the long arm of British naval justice and almost certain death at the gallows. Led by Fletcher Christian, the party



was made up of eight other mutineers, six Tahitian men, 12 Tahitian women and a child. Once they were settled on the island the *Bounty* was burnt (both to prevent escape and to escape detection), but their island community proved to be anything but a safe haven. Chaos and bloodshed ruled the first years, largely due to the English mutineers' slavlike treatment of the Polynesian men. Things escalated when a mutineer demanded that one of the Tahitians give up his wife, following the death of the mutineer's partner in a fall. A cycle of murder and revenge commenced, and by 1794 all six Tahitian men and five of the nine mutineers, including Fletcher Christian, had been killed. Only Young, Adams, Quintal and McCoy survived.

The few peaceful years that followed were brought to an end when McCoy discovered how to produce a killer spirit from the roots of the *ti* plant. By 1799, under the influence of the drink, McCoy had thrown himself into the sea with a rock tied around his neck and Quintal had become so crazed under the drink's influence that Adams and Young

killed him in self-defence. A year later Young died of asthma, leaving John Adams as the sole survivor of the 15 men who had arrived a decade earlier.

Populated by Adams (who had recently discovered religion), 10 women and 23 children, Adamstown was a neat little settlement of God-fearing Christians when Captain Mayhew Folger of the American sealing ship *Topaz* rediscovered Pitcairn Island in 1809, solving the 19-year mystery of what had happened to Christian and the *Bounty* after the mutiny. By this time British attention was focused on the struggle with Napoleon and there was no interest in the mutineer who was guilty of a crime that was now decades old. The next visitors, the British ships HMS *Briton* and *Targus*, arrived in 1814, unaware of Folger's earlier visit but also deciding there was no point in taking any action against the lone mutineer.

Ship visits became more frequent, and by the time Adams died in 1829 there was concern that the island would become overpopulated. In 1831 the British Government relocated the islanders to Tahiti, but within

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

On 28 April 1789 Captain William Bligh and 18 crewmen of the HMS *Bounty* were involuntarily relieved of their duties and set adrift in an open boat off the island of Tofua in Tonga, with a minimum of supplies. The most famous naval mutiny in history, the incident made the *Bounty* a household name and gave Bligh a centuries-long reputation for bad-tempered cruelty. The event also inspired several Hollywood extravaganzas and a plethora of books.

The *Bounty*'s mission was to fetch breadfruit from Tahiti to feed England's African slave population in the Caribbean. Under the command of Bligh, an expert navigator who had trained under Cook, the expedition arrived in Tahiti in September 1788 after a particularly arduous 10-month journey. The breadfruit season was over and they had to wait six months in Tahiti before returning. Three weeks into the return journey, the crew, led by the master's mate Fletcher Christian, mutinied and set Bligh adrift on an open longboat with his loyal crew members.

Traditionally, Bligh has been painted as the brutal villain in the incident, taken to violent outbursts and fond of floggings. Christian, on the other hand, was seen as the crew's saviour, and so became a literary romantic hero and a swashbuckling good guy in Hollywood flicks – Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Marlon Brando and Mel Gibson have all waved a musket in his name. In more recent times, attempts have been made to turn these reputations around, to the extent that Bligh is seen in some circles as a kindly captain while Christian is regarded as a mad drug addict. Whatever their characters – a topic that will probably remain moot for years to come – it's likely that the mutineers were not motivated by Bligh alone. Six months in Tahiti, and the Tahitian brides taken by many of the crew, would also have had something to do with it.

Bligh

Whatever problems Bligh had with people skills and anger management, he was a brilliant navigator. Against the odds, he managed to get the longboat, and most of his loyal crew, 7000km from Tonga to Timor in the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia).

They landed in Tonga, hoping to secure provisions, but local unrest forced them to cast off after loading only the most meagre of rations. Quartermaster John Norton was killed by islanders. Sailing west, they were the first Europeans to sight Fiji, and they also charted several unknown islands in Vanuatu.

They finally reached Timor in the Dutch East Indies on 14 June 1789. Bligh, determined to get that breadfruit, returned to Tahiti in 1792. This time he sensibly brought along 19 marines – in case of further morale problems. Bligh's career also took him to Australia, and in 1806 he was governor of New South Wales when the so-called 'rum rebellion' overturned his government. Bligh was exonerated from blame – again.

The Mutineers

Under Christian's command the mutineers returned to Tahiti, then attempted to settle on Tubai in the Austral Islands. Meeting local resistance, they split into two groups: Fletcher took a group of sailors and Tahitians off in search of Pitcairn Island, while a second group of 16 sailors stayed behind on Tahiti.

months 10 of the Pitcairners, lacking immunity to a variety of diseases, had died – including Thursday October Christian, the son of Fletcher Christian and the first child to be born on Pitcairn. By the year's end, the 65 survivors were all back on Pitcairn.

The island became a British colony in 1838, but when the population grew beyond 150 there were again fears of overpopulation. This time the entire population, then

numbering 194, was moved to Norfolk Island, an uninhabited former Australian prison island between Australia and NZ. Not all the settlers were content with their well-equipped new home, and in 1858, two years after being relocated, 16 Pitcairners returned to their isolated outpost, just in time to prevent the French annexing Pitcairn to their Polynesian colony. More families returned over the years, raising the population to 43.

The Pursuit

After Bligh returned to England, Captain Edward Edwards (a tyrant who made Bligh look like a saint) was sent in the *Pandora* to search for the mutineers.

Edwards sailed past Ducie Atoll in the Pitcairn group, but he didn't see the larger island 470km to the west where Christian's small troupe had settled. However, Edwards did find and capture 14 of the 16 mutineers who had remained on Tahiti, and he stuffed them into a cage on the *Pandora*'s deck before heading back for England. Unfortunately, Edward's sailing skills were not up to Bligh's standards and he ended up sinking the *Pandora* on the Great Barrier Reef off Australia's northeast coast. Of the surviving prisoners, three were ultimately hanged for the mutiny.

Books

The American duo of Nordhoff and Hall wrote three books on the *Bounty* mutiny and its aftermath in 1934. The first of the three, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, provided the plot line for the first two Hollywood versions of the story (see later). *Men Against the Sea* follows Bligh's epic open-boat voyage, while *Pitcairn Island* follows Fletcher Christian and his band to Pitcairn.

Two other sources are Richard Hough's *Captain Bligh and Mr Christian* (1973) and Greg Denning's *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992).

More recently, *Fragile Paradise*, by Glynn Christian (Fletcher's great-great-great-grandson), is a well-researched, if a little speculative, investigation of the mutiny and the story of the mutineers on Pitcairn.

The newest title to take on this tale is *The Bounty – The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty* (2003) by Caroline Alexander. It focuses on the 10 mutineers who were captured in Tahiti and their subsequent fate, and brings a fresh perspective to the story by casting Bligh in a good light.

Films

The *Bounty* story has been made into a handful of motion pictures. The first, and perhaps worst, was *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933) – a low-budget flick filmed in Pitcairn, Tahiti and Australia that's memorable only for being Errol Flynn's first film (he was cast as a noble Fletcher Christian). Simultaneously, Hollywood was making *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935) with Clark Gable in the same role – neither film was too concerned with historical accuracy. The 1962 remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, starring Marlon Brando as Christian and filmed in Tahiti, was slightly less inaccurate.

The Bounty (1984), based on Hough's book, is a surprisingly good re-enactment of the tale, with magnificent scenes of Mo'orea in French Polynesia. Anthony Hopkins plays a more likeable and complex Captain Bligh and Mel Gibson plays Fletcher Christian.

All these movies end with the mutineers' arrival on Pitcairn. Perhaps one day a studio will take on the equally fascinating tale of what happened after they arrived – the story of slavery, racial violence, murder, alcoholism, insanity and religion. All the elements are there for a Hollywood blockbuster.

Right up to the mid-1870s, Pitcairners were followers of the Church of England. However, the arrival of a box of Seventh-Day Adventist literature from the US in 1876 saw the beginnings of change. A decade later, the arrival of a Seventh-Day Adventist missionary heralded real conversion from the teachings of Pastor Simon Young. A mission ship was sent out from the US in 1890 and the happy proselytes

were baptised with a dousing in one of the island's rock pools, and the local pigs were swiftly killed to remove the temptation of pork.

Although Pitcairn's population grew to 223 just before WWII, depopulation rather than overpopulation has become the major concern. In 1956 the figure was 161, in 1966 it was 96 and in 1976 Pitcairners numbered 74. Since then, the figure has wavered in the

40s and 50s. For more on Pitcairn's recent history, see the boxed text, p421.

SIGHTS

Reminders of the island's *Bounty* origins are kept in a new **museum**, which was opened in 2005 by Pitcairn's governor, Richard Fell. A flight of wooden stairs lead from Adamstown's main square to the low-set white and green building, where exhibits are displayed in four rooms in a climate-controlled environment. The most famous item is Fletcher Christian's **Bounty bible**, kept under glass in a red stand. It was actually sold in 1839, but was returned to the island in 1949. Pitcairners hope that many more items will eventually find their way back to the island, and to a new home in this state-of-the-art little museum.

The **Bounty anchor**, salvaged by Irving Johnson in 1957, stands between the courthouse and post office, and there's a **Bounty cannon** further along the road. A second cannon is being restored in Australia and will be returned once completed. The **anchor** from the *Acadia*, wrecked on Ducie Atoll (p428), is displayed on the Edge, overlooking Bounty Bay.

The only **mutineer's grave** is that of John Adams, who changed his name from Alexander Smith, perhaps hoping to avoid arrest if the feared naval squad ever turned up. **Fletcher Christian's cave**, overlooking the settlement, is where the leading mutineer is said to have hidden, either to watch for pursuing ships or to evade the killings that swept the island in the settlement's early years. On 23 January each year, the *Bounty's* demise is commemorated by towing a burning model of the ship across Bounty Bay.

The **petroglyphs** on the rock face at the bottom of Down Rope are reminders of Pitcairn Island's pre-*Bounty* Polynesian habitation. The island's important Polynesian stone quarry is at Tautama, 1km west around the coast. When the mutineers arrived there were also marae platforms and stone images, which the devoutly Christian mutineers promptly tossed in the sea. The road to Down Rope continues to **St Paul's Point** and **Big Pool**, a beautiful natural pool fed and drained by the sea. The island's **Galapagos tortoise** is the survivor of a pair left here by a visiting yacht in the 1940s. Until recently the tortoise was called Mr T, but a

visiting specialist discovered he was a she, so it's now Mrs T. She lives among banana plantations on the other side of the island from Adamstown.

In addition to the museum, the island's other new attraction is the series of **eco trails** being developed in conjunction with Trinity College in Ireland. The first trail is up and running, and has a handful of stops with explanatory notes and photographs; stop No 5 details the island's 11 endemic plant species.

SLEEPING

There's no hotel on the island. The Lodge, a small, comfortable cottage, is available as long as it is not occupied by government officials. Visitors are also accommodated with islanders, typically paying about US\$300 per week for room and board. The **Island Council** (☎ 7612-24115; fax 244116; admin@pitcairn.gov.pn; postal address: Pitcairn Island, South Pacific Ocean, via NZ) will advise about accommodation arrangements when it replies to you about your visitor-licence application.

SHOPPING

The islanders do a busy trade turning out curios for visiting ships, including woven pandanus bags and a variety of sharks and dolphins carved out of *miro* wood as well as the famous models of the *Bounty*. Honey, Pitcairn Island stamps and telephone cards are also specialities.

Limited food supplies are available from the Co-op Store in Adamstown, which opens three times a week for a few hours.

GETTING AROUND

Tin, *Tub* and *Moss* are 13m open aluminium boats used for transport between Bounty Bay and boats anchored offshore, and for occasional trips to Oeno, Henderson and Ducie. Despite their humdrum names, these longboats are Pitcairn's lifeline. Everything but everything comes ashore via them, and it's no mean feat for the island men to load them in swells of up to 6m as they pitch alongside huge ocean-going cargo vessels.

Three- and four-wheeled fat-tired motorcycles, or ATVs, are the usual means of transport around the island; Pitcairners rarely walk. The island's six or so kilometres of dirt roads turn to sticky mud when it rains.

READING THE LAND

There's a straightforward, down-to-earth approach to everything Pitcairnese, and the island's place names are no exception – they're simple, descriptive and rather worrying. Over the years, islanders appear to have had a disturbing propensity for falling right off Pitcairn, many of them tumbling down a sheer cliff face while gathering birds' eggs, chasing goats or fishing. Heathen idols were found and cast into the sea at Down the God, and the intriguingly named Little George Coc'nuts was a coconut grove owned by George Young, son of mutineer Ned Young. Northwest of Adamstown, below Fletcher Christian's Cave, the cliffs must be particularly dangerous since the map lists the following: Where Dan Fall, Johnny Fall and the succinct Tom Off. It's no better on the west coast, Where Warren Fall, or the east coast, Where Freddie Fall. But the south coast has the most enigmatic and worrying warning of all – Oh Dear.

OTHER ISLANDS

OENO ISLAND

pop 0 / area 1 sq km

Two narrow passages enter Oeno's central lagoon. The outer reef is about 4km across, with a palm-covered island a few kilometres long on the western side, pointing towards a smaller sandbank islet beside the narrow pass through the reef.

Captain James Henderson, who gave his name to Henderson Island, came across Oeno Island in 1819, but it was an American whaling ship which gave Oeno its name in 1824.

The *Bowden* was wrecked on Oeno in 1893, and the captain and crew made their way to Pitcairn in the ship's boat. The Pitcairn islanders made four salvage trips to the *Bowden*, resulting in one of the islanders contracting typhoid fever from the filthy bilge water. Back on Pitcairn, the infection raced through the islanders, killing 13 people.

Unless you've got your own yacht, your only chance of getting to Oeno is in January, when Pitcairners fit out two of their longboats with essential supplies and swap everyday life on Pitcairn for a fortnight's summer holiday on Oeno. The 120km journey is a 10-hour overnight trip.

HENDERSON ISLAND

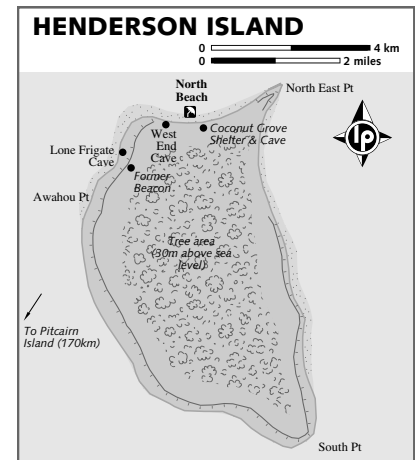
pop 0 / area 36 sq km

This classic example of a *makatea* island, 168km northeast of Pitcairn, is the largest island of the Pitcairn group. Measuring 9.6km long by 5.1km wide, it is nearly eight times as big as Pitcairn itself. The island is believed to have been uplifted by three

undersea volcanoes – Adams, Young and Bounty – to the southeast of Pitcairn.

A new fringing reef has grown up around two-thirds of the island's 26km coastline. The sheer 15m-high cliffs are the seaward face of the old coral reef. These run all the way around the island and are difficult to climb. Henderson's interior rises to a 30m flatland with a central depression which was once the lagoon inside the old reef. The sharp, crumbling ground in the interior is carpeted with a dense thicket of *pisonia* brush and stands of the fine *miro* wood, which Pitcairners occasionally harvest for woodcarving.

The island is populated by Polynesian rats and four species of endemic land birds – the flightless Henderson rail, the colourful Stephen's lorikeet, the territorial Henderson fruit dove and the Henderson warbler. Nine seabird species and the occasional green sea turtle nest here.



The usual landing spot is long North Beach, which is littered with flotsam and jetsam. During certain tides there is sometimes a freshwater spring in a cave at the north of the island.

Henderson is unusual for a raised atoll in that it has not been dramatically altered by exploitation for phosphate reserves. Because of this unique condition and its rare birdlife, the island was declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1988. Visitors require a licence to visit, which is dependent on approval by the Pitcairn Island Council.

History

Polynesians settled on Henderson between the 12th and 15th centuries, and there may have been earlier inhabitants between 900 BC and 350 BC. Limited freshwater supplies, lack of soil for agriculture and dangerous reef entries made Henderson a difficult place to live.

The island was uninhabited when Portuguese explorer Quirós, sailing under the Spanish flag, visited in 1606. The island was rediscovered by the *Bounty* mutineers in 1790, en route to their new home on Pitcairn, and again in 1819 by Captain James Henderson of the British merchant ship *Hercules*.

The wrecking of the whaling ship *Essex* on the island in 1820, after a charge by a sperm whale near the Marquesas, is believed to have provided the inspiration for Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. During the crew's stay on the island, a cave was discovered containing six or eight skeletons. Six skeletons were found in a cave on the north coast by a visiting party from Pitcairn in 1958, though it's not known if they were the same skeletons.

A year earlier, Robert Tomarchin, an American, and his chimpanzee Moko made an unannounced six-week visit to the island. In the early 1980s another American, Arthur M 'Smiley' Ratcliffe (or Ratliff), had plans to buy or lease the island, flatten the vegetation, turn it into a cattle ranch and build a home and airstrip. This was a major factor in the island's subsequent World Heritage listing.

Over the years, various investigations into the island's natural history and archaeology have been conducted.

DUCIE ATOLL

pop 0 / area 1 sq km

This classic coral atoll is composed of the 100m-wide main *motu* (island), Acadia Island, stretching for over 3km around the lagoon, and three smaller islands. The lagoon is inaccessible, but on its eastern side gentle whirlpools drain water straight out to the open sea. There are no palm trees and the vegetation is limited to just two hardy types. Polynesian rats, lizards and tens of thousands of seabirds inhabit the island.

Ducie was discovered by Quirós in 1606 and named Encarnacion. It was rediscovered by Edward Edwards on the *Pandora* in 1791, during his *Bounty* hunt, and named after his patron, Lord Ducie. After the British *Acadia* was shipwrecked here in 1881, the crew made a nightmare 13-day voyage to Pitcairn in the ship's boat. Two of them married Pitcairners, and until recently Coffin was a familiar Pitcairn family name (from one of those shipwrecked sailors, Phillip Coffin).

The usual landing point on Acadia Island is marked by a **memorial**, which notes the recovery of the *Acadia*'s main anchor in 1990. The anchor can now be seen on Pitcairn (see p426). The wreck of the ship is directly offshore from the monument in about 10m of water. A short distance to the west, a marked trail wanders across the island to the lagoon side. An alarming variety of flotsam litters the island, including countless glass bottles, plastic debris and hundreds of fishing-net floats.

PITCAIRN ISLAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

See p426 for information on Pitcairn's limited sleeping options.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For further information on Pitcairn, try the following websites:

Dea Birkett (www.deabirkett.com) Website of British journalist and author of *Serpent in Paradise* (1997), a contentious account of the writer's four-month stay on Pitcairn in 1991. After its publication, a Fletcher Christian descendant commented, 'It's not quite a fatwa, but she's

not welcome [on Pitcairn]'. Birkett has since written articles on Pitcairn for a variety of newspapers, from the *New York Times* to the *Guardian*.

Henderson Island (www.winthrop.dk/hender.html or <http://whc.unesco.org/sites/487.htm>) Both sites deal with this World Heritage-listed island.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/pacific/pitcairn-islands) Pitcairn profile.

New Zealand Herald (www.nzherald.co.nz) Daily newspaper with news and commentary about Pitcairn and the sex trials.

Pitcairn Island Web Site (www.lareau.org/pitc.html) With information, history, genealogy, virtual shopping, contact addresses and links to articles and related websites.

Pitcairn Islands Government (www.government.pn) Includes Pitcairn's history and Philatelic Bureau. Order online *A Guide to Pitcairn* (US\$15; published 2000), the government's official publication, or subscribe to the monthly newsletter *Pitcairn Miscellany* (US\$15 annually).

Pitcairn Islands Study Center (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>) California-based centre with shipping schedules and Pitcairn history.

Pitcairn Today (www.onlinepitcairn.com/pitcairn_today.htm) Relatively recent local news.

MONEY

NZ dollars (for exchange rates see the Quick Reference page) are the official currency of Pitcairn Island, although other major currencies are accepted. Personal cheques and travellers cheques can be cashed at the Island Secretary's office. Budget on at least US\$300 per week.

TELEPHONE & FAX

You can telephone or fax Pitcairn Island through Inmarsat, but the charges are based on satellite time so you'll get billed for dialling and connection times whether or not the phone is answered. Count on about US\$3.50 a minute to NZ or Australia, and US\$5.50 to the rest of the world.

The communication station is usually unattended, but there is an answering machine for phone calls. The station is checked for calls at 8pm, midnight and 5am GMT; if you want to talk with someone, this is the best time to call the **control room phone** (☎ 76233-7765). There's just one public telephone on the island; its number is ☎ 76233-7766; the fax number is 7767. Pitcairn phonecards are available if you need to use the phone.

TIME

Pitcairn is 8½ hours behind GMT (9½ during daylight saving).

VISAS

No visa is necessary for visitors while their ship is at anchor. If you want to stay on Pitcairn after your ship leaves, however, your stay must be approved by the islanders and a six-month permit issued.

Visa applications are processed by the **Pitcairn Islands Administration** (☎ 64-9-366 0186; admin@pitcairn.gov.pn; PO Box 105 696, Auckland, NZ). Think up a good reason for your stay and allow six months for the application to be considered. The application fee is US\$20, and the licence itself costs US\$100 (US\$50 for visitors under 18).

TRANSPORT IN PITCAIRN ISLAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pitcairn is remote with a capital 'R'. There's no airstrip (although one might be in the pipeline) and no way of getting here except across the seemingly endless blue ocean.

Landings on Pitcairn are notoriously difficult; it's not unknown to travel all the way to the island and then be unable to set foot on land due to rough seas. The island's official website even posts the following disclaimer: '...no Government responsibility is accepted...for any death by accident...during the process of landing or departing'. All this could change in the near future, however, as EU funding has been allocated to build a breakwater to shelter Bounty Bay and its new jetty.

Cargo Ship

Cargo vessels stopping at Pitcairn anchor offshore and transfer cargo and passengers to longboats (see p426), which dock at Bounty Bay. The standard fare from Auckland to Pitcairn is around US\$1000 one way per person, though there are no longer any regular carriers. For schedules of Panama Canal-Auckland cargo ships that will take passengers, contact the British Consulate-General in Auckland, NZ, or shipping companies; schedules are posted on the Pitcairn Islands Study

Center website (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>). The 5300-km journey from NZ to Pitcairn takes about seven days. Alternatively, very occasional ships do the 30-hour journey to Pitcairn from Mangareva (French Polynesia).

Getting off the island requires waiting until a ship comes by – it can be a long wait.

Cruise Ship

About a dozen cruise ships call at Pitcairn every year. Like cargo vessels, they anchor well offshore and, seas permitting, passengers are ferried to Bounty Bay aboard the ship's rubber inflatable or its tender, or alternatively on the Pitcairn longboats. For details on which ships are due when, see

the Pitcairn Islands Study Center website (<http://library.puc.edu/pitcairn>).

Yacht

Mangareva (p665) in French Polynesia is the best place to try your luck for a place on a Pitcairn-bound yacht. Visiting yachties should come well equipped – Pitcairners are happy to sell fresh fruit, which they grow on the island, but other supplies generally have to be imported from NZ and may be in short supply. There is no sheltered anchorage at Pitcairn and boats must be moved when the winds change.

GETTING AROUND

For details on getting around the islands, see p426.

Rarotonga & the Cook Islands

Christened after the South Pacific's most famous explorer, a certain Captain James Cook, the 15 tiny specks of land that collectively make up the Cook Islands are just about as far as you'll ever get from the outside world. Sprinkled over two million square kilometres of empty sea, slap-bang in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, these isolated islands have long been a haven for real-life runaways and wannabe Robinson Crusoes, and it's not hard to see what drew them here.

The Cook Islands are the classic South Seas paradise, a nation of tiny tropical islands cloaked in coconut trees, encircled by cerulean-blue lagoons and fringed by sweeping arcs of powder-white sand. But you'll find there's much more to the Cooks than glorious good looks. The main island of Rarotonga is busy, buzzy and surprisingly modern, with plenty of funky cafés, fine-dining restaurants and after-dark bars to explore.

Rarotonga's contemporary surface remains underpinned by an unmistakeably Polynesian character, but if it's traditional culture you're looking for you should head for the outer islands. You'll see a far more authentic side of the Cooks here – whether it's knocking back some home-brew at a traditional 'Atiuan *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking session), plunging into an underground pool on Mitiaro and Ma'uake, or exploring the ancient *makatea* (raised coral island) of Mangaia. If you're really looking to get away from it all, the little-visited coral atolls and crystal-clear lagoons of the Northern Group are just a few hours away by plane (or several unforgettable days away by inter-island freighter). Just be careful how long you stick around – many travellers have found their short visits have a habit of turning into rather more extended stays.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savour the sights and sounds of an **island night** (p452)
- Trek along Rarotonga's **inland trails** and **valley walks** (p444)
- Hire a kayak and finding your very own desert island in Aitutaki's stunning **lagoon** (p456)
- Take one of 'Atiu's **guided tours** (p462) in search of coffee, caves or the island's natural wildlife
- Delve into the depths of Mangaia's mysterious **burial caves** (p469)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Any time of the year is a good time to visit the Cook Islands. It's warm and sunny practically all the year round; the hottest, wettest months are during the cyclone season between November and March. High/low temperatures are 29°C/23°C in February, dipping to 25°C/18°C from June to September. See p827 for Avarua's climate chart.

Historically, a severe cyclone has hit the Cooks once every 20 years – but in 2005 the islands were battered by five major cyclones in five weeks, a clear sign that something's afoot in the climate of the South Pacific.

Book flights well in advance for December, when many Cook Islanders return home from overseas for the Christmas holidays.

HISTORY

Cook Islanders are closely related to the Maori of New Zealand (NZ) and French Polynesia. Historians believe that Polynesian migrations from the Society Islands to the Cook Islands began around the 5th century AD, and oral history traces Rarotongan ancestry back about 1400 years. A *marae* (religious meeting ground) on Motutapu, off the coast of Rarotonga, is estimated to be around 1500 years old. In the 14th century canoes departed Rarotonga for Aotearoa (NZ); the settlers were the ancestors of the present-day NZ Maori tribes.

Pukapuka, in the Northern Group of the Cook Islands, was the first island to be sighted by a European (Don Alvaro de Mendaña y

Neyra, on 20 August 1595). Eleven years later Pedro Fernández de Quirós stopped at Rakahanga. James Cook explored much of the group in 1773 and 1777 (though he only set foot on Palmerston, and never managed to find Rarotonga).

The islands were initially known as the Hervey Islands in honour of a British Lord of the Admiralty, but in an atlas published in 1835 the Russian cartographer Admiral Johann von Krusenstern renamed them in honour of Captain Cook.

Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived on Aitutaki in 1821. Papeiha, a convert from Ra'iatea in the Society Islands, moved to Rarotonga in 1823 and was responsible for converting the islands to Christianity. Though many *marae* were destroyed and sacred artefacts were carted off to British museums, much of the island's culture survived intact, including the traditional titles of *ariki* (chief) and *mataiapo* (sub-chief), the system of land inheritance (see the boxed text, p441) and the indigenous language. The missionaries imposed a catalogue of strict rules and doctrines (known as the 'Blue Laws') and brought with them deadly diseases such as whooping cough, measles, smallpox and influenza, leading to a long-term decline in population numbers.

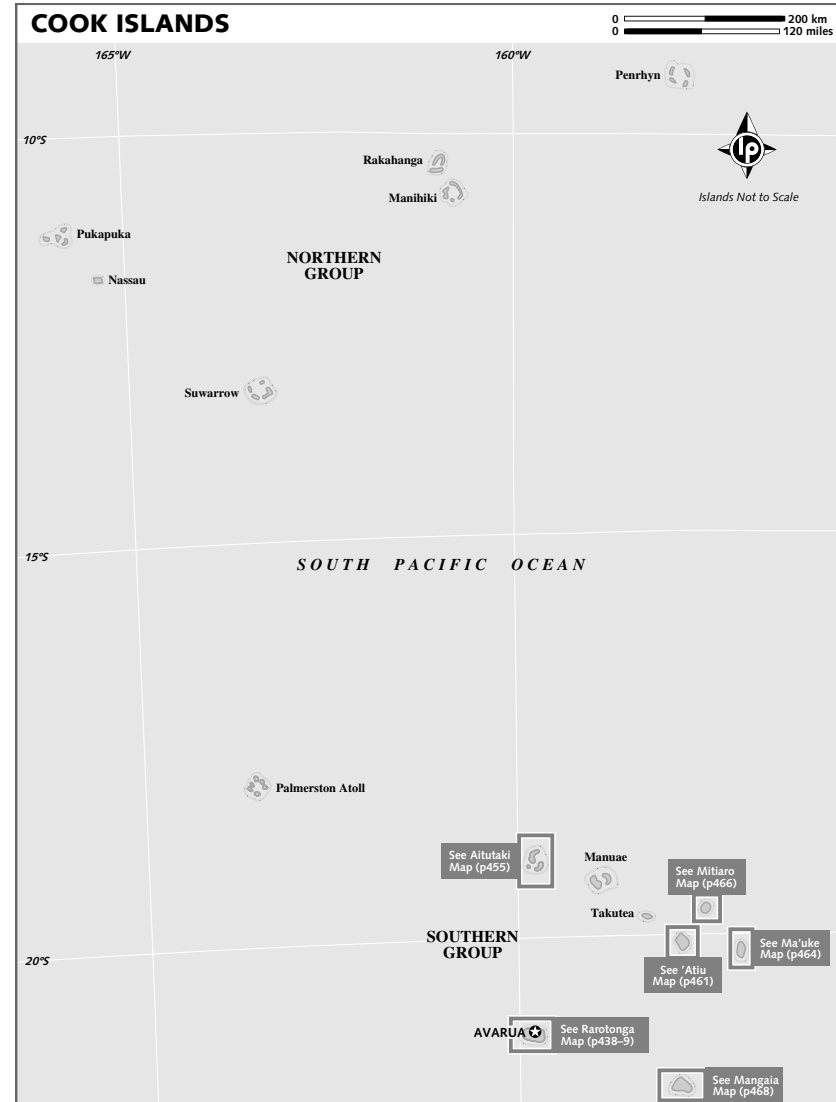
The Cook Islands became a British protectorate in 1888, in response to fears of French colonialism. In 1901 the islands were annexed to NZ and the Southern and Northern Groups together became known as the Cook Islands.

During WWII the US built airstrips on Penrhyn and Aitutaki, but the Cooks escaped the war largely unscathed, unlike many of their South Pacific neighbours. In 1965 the Cook Islands became internally self-governing, although foreign policy and defence were left to NZ.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Thanks to the flow of people between the islands and Australia and NZ, the contemporary face of the Cook Islands is surprisingly modern. The main island of Rarotonga is a sophisticated and cosmopolitan place, but beneath the apparently Westernised veneer aspects of traditional Maori culture survive; examples include land



RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Avarua (Rarotonga)
- **Population:** 14,000
- **Land area:** 241 sq km
- **Number of islands:** 15
- **International telephone code:** 682
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** Cook Islands Maori and English
- **Greeting:** *Kia orana*
- **Website:** www.cook-islands.com

inheritance, family structure and traditional titles. Every native islander is part of a family clan connected to the ancient system of *ariki*. Though most people think of themselves as Cook Islanders, many still refer to their 'home island' and will happily relate the differences between the various islands. Politics, sport, dance, music, land and

inheritance are universal passions, and most Cook Islanders believe in the importance of community, family and traditional values.

Lifestyle

Contemporary Cook Islanders (at least on Rarotonga) are a thoroughly 21st-century people, with modern houses, regular jobs

and reasonable salaries. On the outer islands, however, you'll still find many families living a more traditional lifestyle – fishing, growing crops and practising traditional arts and crafts. Family is an important influence on daily life, and since the system of land tenure relies entirely on family genealogy, it pays to know how you fit into the family tree. Church is another important influence, and the islands all but shut down on a Sunday. Friendliness, hospitality and respect for others are highly valued in Cook Islands culture, and it pays to bring along a laid-back attitude – Cook Islanders have a notoriously liberal attitude towards timekeeping.

Population

The population of the Cook Islands is around 14,000, but the vast majority of islanders live overseas. More than 50,000 Cook Islanders live in NZ, half that number in Australia, and several thousand more in French Polynesia, the Americas, Europe and Asia. More than 90% of the Cooks' population live in the Southern Group, with 60% of islanders living on Rarotonga.

Like many Pacific islands, the Cooks are struggling with a long-term population drain, as islanders move overseas in search of higher wages. More than 90% of the population is Polynesian, though the people of some of the Northern Group islands are more closely related to Samoans than to other Cook Islanders.

ARTS

Dance & Music

If there's one activity that really gets Cook Islanders fired up, it's dancing – they're reputed to be the best dancers in Polynesia. You'll see them strut their stuff at an 'island night', which combines a traditional meal and a music and dance performance. Traditional dance forms include the *karakia* (prayer dance), *pe'e ura pa'u* (drum-beat dance), *ate* (choral song) and *kaparima* (action song). Men stamp, gesture and knock their knees together, while women twitch their hips in an unmistakably suggestive manner.

Cook Islanders are also passionate singers and musicians. The close harmony singing at any Cook Islands church service is a real highlight, but the islanders also love

their pop music. Polynesian string bands, usually featuring guitars and ukuleles, often perform at local restaurants and hotels.

Arts & Crafts

Traditional woodcarving and woven handicrafts (pandanus mats, baskets, purses and fans) are still popular in the Cooks. You'll see women going to church wearing finely woven *rito* (coconut-fibre) hats, mainly made on the Northern Group islands. Ceremonial adzes, stone taro pounders and *pupu ei* (snail-shell necklaces) are produced on Mangaia, and the best place to see traditional *tivaevae* (appliqué work, used for bedspreads, cushion covers and home decoration) is at the Fibre Arts Studio on 'Atiu. Black pearls grown in the Northern Group are one of the Cooks' largest industries, and you'll see plenty of black-pearl and shell jewellery around. 'Ei (floral necklaces) and 'ei katu (tiaras) are customarily given to friends and honoured guests – you're bound to receive a few during your time in the Cooks, especially if you visit the outer islands.

Literature

You should be able to pick up most of these titles around Avarua's main bookshops (see p437).

An Island to Oneself by Tom Neale is the classic desert-island read, written by a New Zealander who lived as a virtual hermit on the island of Suvarrow during the 1950s and 1960s. It's packed with entertaining incidents and tall tales.

Robert Dean Frisbie ran a trading outpost on Pukapuka in the 1920s and wrote two evocative memoirs, *The Book of Pukapuka* and *The Island of Desire*.

If you're after local legends and traditional stories, pick up *Cook Islands Legends* and *The Ghost at Tokatarava and Other Stories from the Cook Islands*, both by the notable Cook Islands author Jon Jonassen. The Pukapukan poet Kauraka Kauraka has published several books of poems.

There are plenty of lavish coffee-table books about the Cook Islands, including *Visions of the Pacific*, which commemorates the 1992 Festival of Pacific Arts, and *The Cook Islands*, a beautiful pictorial tour through the various people and places of the Cooks.

Guide to Cook Islands Birds by DT Holyoak is a useful guide to the islands' native birds, with colour photos and tips for identification.

For a more in-depth guide to the Cook Islands, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Rarotonga & the Cook Islands*.

LANGUAGE

Cook Islands Maori (Rarotongan) is a Polynesian language similar to New Zealand Maori and Marquesan (from French Polynesia). There are some small dialectical differences between many of the islands, and some northern islands have their own languages. English is spoken as a second (or third) language by virtually everyone.

In Rarotongan, the glottal stop replaces the 'h' of similar Polynesian languages; eg the Tahitian word for 'one', *tahi* (ta-hee), is *ta'i* (ta-ee) in Rarotongan.

Rarotongan basics

Hello.	<i>Kia orana.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Aere ra.</i>
How are you?	<i>Pe'ea koe?</i>
Please.	<i>Ine.</i>
Thanks (very much).	<i>Meitaki (ma'ata).</i>
Yes.	<i>Ae.</i>
No.	<i>Kare.</i>
Cheers!	<i>Kia manuia!</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The Cook Islands' small land mass (just 241 sq km) is scattered over about two million sq km of ocean, midway between American Samoa and Tahiti.

The 15 islands are divided into Northern and Southern Groups. The Southern Group are younger volcanic islands, while the Northern Group are coral atolls that have formed on top of ancient sunken volcanoes (see the boxed text, p63). 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia are 'raised islands' characterised by *makatea* – rocky coastal areas formed by uplifted coral reefs. All the Northern Group islands are low coral atolls, with an outer reef encircling a lagoon.

Waste management is a major issue in the Cook Islands. Glass, plastic and aluminium are collected for recycling, but there's still a huge surplus of rubbish. Water supply is also a major concern.

BEST EATING

Rarotonga has some top-notch places to eat, ranging from cut-price cafés to full-blown fine-dining restaurants, and you'll find a couple of hidden gems on Aitutaki, too. On the outer islands you'll be stuck with your own cooking, so you might as well make the most of eating out on the mainland! You won't find much local food on restaurant menus, apart from *ika mata* (raw fish in coconut cream). The best place to try traditional cooking is at an island night or *umukai* (traditional feast cooked in an underground oven).

- Long the island's best-known restaurant, Flame Tree (p451) is still going strong.
- The freshest of food is served in a quintessential island setting at Vaima Restaurant & Bar (p451).
- At Tamarind House (p451) gastronomic delights are cooked up by Rarotonga's top chef.
- The truly 'slow food' at Tauono's (p459) is produced with fresh organic ingredients from the on-site garden.
- Family-run Café Tupuna (p458) offers the most imaginative cuisine on Aitutaki.

The biggest threat to the Cooks is global warming, which could render much of the Northern Group uninhabitable within the next 100 years (p66). Severe cyclones are also likely to become a great deal more common.

Wildlife

Rarotonga's mountainous centre is covered with a dense jungle of ferns, creepers and towering trees, providing the perfect habitat for the island's rich birdlife. Coconut palms and spectacular tropical flowers grow with abandon almost everywhere in the Cook Islands, though the once-common pandanus trees are now rare on Rarotonga and 'Atiu.

The only native mammal is the Pacific fruit bat (flying fox), found on Mangaia and Rarotonga. Pigs, chickens and goats were introduced by the first Polynesian

settlers, along with rats, which devastated the islands' endemic wildlife, especially native birds. The *kakerori* (Rarotongan flycatcher) was almost wiped out but is now recovering thanks to the establishment of the Takitumu Conservation Area on Rarotonga. Other native birds include the cave-dwelling *kopekā* ('Atiu swiftlet) on 'Atiu, the *tanga'eo* (Mangaian kingfisher) and the *kukupā* (Cook Islands fruit dove). The Indian mynah was introduced in 1906 to control coconut stick insects and is now running riot on many Southern Group islands.

RAROTONGA

pop 10,500 / area 67.2 sq km

The capital is the one Cook Island every visitor is guaranteed to see, and it's hardly surprising that most people never manage to explore any further. The island is bordered by a flame-orange reef and cobalt-coloured lagoon, and ringed by a sparkling white beach. The land rises from sea level through lush fields and rural farmland to the thickly forested mountains at the island's heart. There's plenty of history and heritage to match the island's natural charms, from tumbledown *marae* and ancient monuments to some of the best-preserved coral churches in the Cooks. In the heat of a tropical afternoon, the island's mingled scent of flower blossom, ripe fruit and salty sea air is simply overpowering, but it's the electrifying beauty that stays with you long after you leave for home.

HISTORY

Traditional history relates that Rarotonga was discovered by Io Tangaroa, who arrived about 1400 years ago from Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands (now part of French Polynesia). In the early 13th century two great warrior chiefs, Tangi'ia from Tahiti and Karika from Samoa, arrived in *vaka* (ocean-going canoes) to conquer the island, and rule Rarotonga as joint kings. The land was divided among six tribes, each headed by an *ariki*. In previous centuries the main villages were located inland around the central mountains, which provided better defence during the frequent conflicts between the different tribes.

RAROTONGA IN...

Two Days

Spend your first day getting acquainted with the island. Take a **circle-island tour** (p446) or hire a scooter and buzz around the back roads (p440). Factor in some snorkelling and swimming around **Muri Lagoon** or **Aro'a Beach** (p445), and relax at one of the island's best restaurants – **Vaima** (p451) or the **Flame Tree** (p451). Spend the second day exploring **Avarua** (p440) and browsing for **souvenirs** (p453). Work up an appetite with a spot of swimming in the lagoon, and then head straight out for an **island night** (p452).

Four Days

Check out some traditional culture on your third day at the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (p441) or **Highland Paradise** (p441). Spend the evening exploring Avarua's **nightlife**; top spots include the **Whatever Bar** (p452) and the **Staircase** (p452). Keep your fourth day free for the island's hidden highlight – the unforgettable **Cross-Island Track** (p444).

The first recorded European visitor was Philip Goodenough, captain of the *Cumberland*, who showed up in 1814 and spent three bloody months looking for sandalwood. In 1823 the missionaries John Williams and Papeiha set out to convert the Rarotongans, and in little more than a year Christianity had taken a firm hold. The missionaries relocated the main villages along the coastline, and Rarotonga became the Cook Islands' headquarters for the LMS.

Fearing French expansionism in the Pacific, Makea Takau, the paramount Rarotongan *ariki*, requested British protection in 1865, but the islands weren't established as a British protectorate until 1888, when Rarotonga became the unofficial capital of the group. The Cook Islands were annexed by NZ in 1901, eventually winning independence in 1965.

ORIENTATION

Though Rarotonga is the largest of the Cook Islands, it's compact and accessible, circumnavigated by a 32km coastal road

known as the Ara Tapu (Sacred Road). Inland you'll find a second road, the Ara Metua (Ancient Road), built some time in the 11th century. The Ara Metua passes through farmland, taro plantations and rambling homesteads in the foothills of Rarotonga's mountainous centre. The centre of the island is covered in jungle and jagged mountains, and can only be crossed on foot. There are no private beaches on Rarotonga, but take care not to cross private land in order to access the shoreline.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bounty Bookshop (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26660; Avarua)

The island's main bookshop is near the post office.

CITC Shopping Centre (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22000; Ara Mairi Nui, Avarua)

Cook Islands Library & Museum Society (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28468; Makea Tinirau Rd, Avarua)

University of the South Pacific (USP; Map pp442-3; ☎ 29415; Makea Tinirau Rd, Avarua) The best (and cheapest) place for books on Cook Islands history, politics and culture.

Internet Access

Email and Internet access is widely available on Rarotonga. The average charge is around NZ\$9 an hour, and it's often cheaper to prepay for an hour or two in advance.

Cybernet.ck (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23004; Avarua)

Dougie's Internet Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27242; Muri Beach) Inside a trailer near Muri Beach.

Kavera Central (☎ 20012; Kavera)

Internet Shop (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20727; Avarua;

☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Wi-fi available.

Telecom (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29680; Tutakimoo Rd, Avarua; ☎ 24hr) Access codes are valid here and at Telepost. Wi-fi available.

Telepost (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29940; CITC Shopping Centre, Ara Mairi Nui, Avarua) Wi-fi available.

Medical Services

Hospital (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22664; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 24hr emergency service) On a steep hill up behind the golf course.

Outpatient clinic (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20065; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) About 1km east of Avarua.

Money

ANZ Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21750; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Sat); **Punanga Nui Market** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 8am-11am Sat) There's an ATM at the main branch in Avarua and at Wigmore's Superstore.

Westpac (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22014; bank@westpac.co.ck; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) The main branch is beside the Foodland supermarket in Avarua. There's another branch at the airport, open for all international flights. Both branches have ATMs.

Post

Post office (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29940; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

Cook Islands Tourist Authority (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29435; www.cook-islands.com; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri; Avarua) The main tourist office can help with everything from accommodation and nightspots to inter-island flights and shipping services.

Travel Agencies

The two main travel agencies on Rarotonga are both in Avarua.

Island Hopper Vacations (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22576;

www.islandhoppervacations.com; Banana Court, Avarua)

Jetsave Travel (Map pp442-3; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave.co.ck; Ara Mairi Nui, Avarua)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Unless you're travelling on your own private yacht, chances are you'll be arriving on the islands by plane from Los Angeles (LA) or Auckland. Air New Zealand and Pacific Blue are the only international carriers that fly through the islands; see p475 for information on getting to and from Rarotonga.

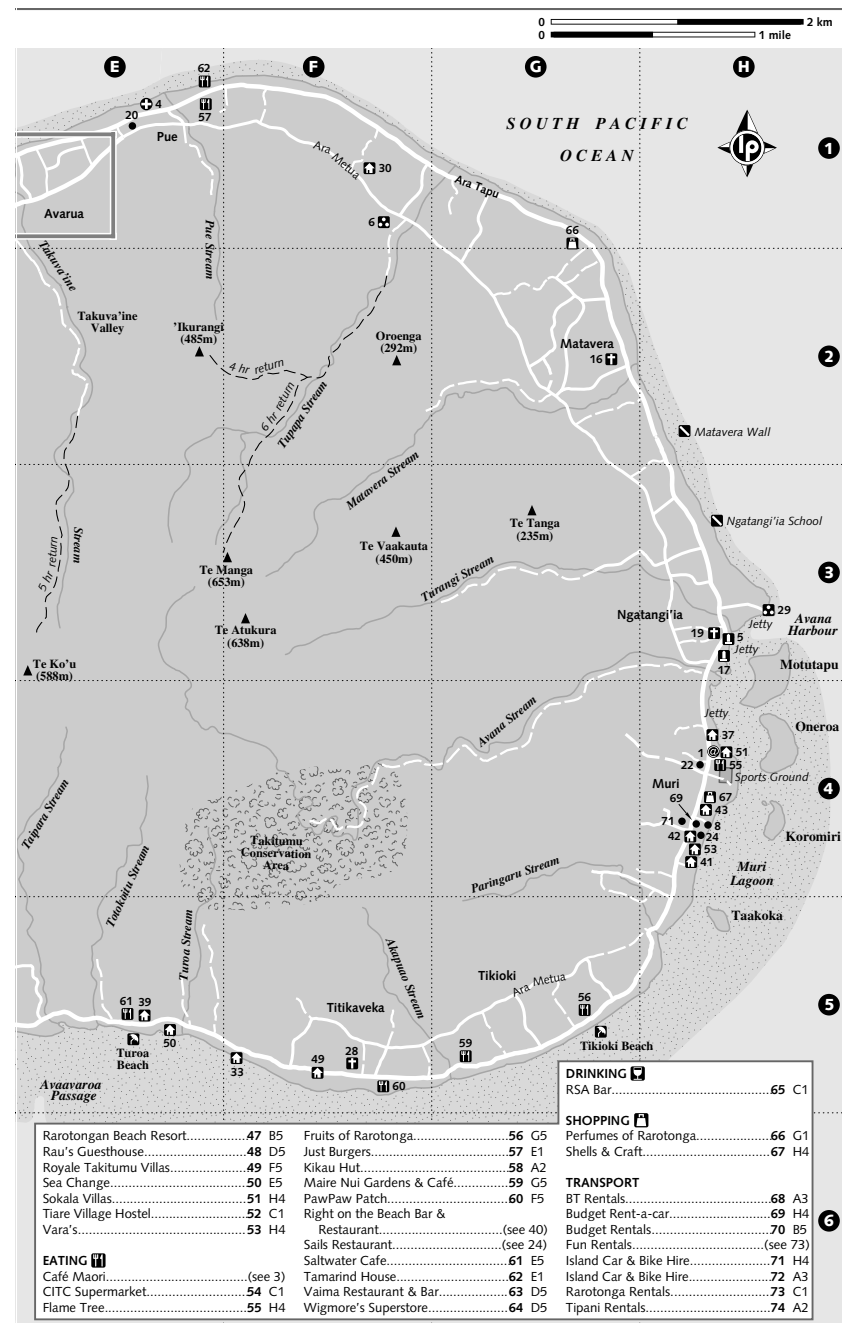
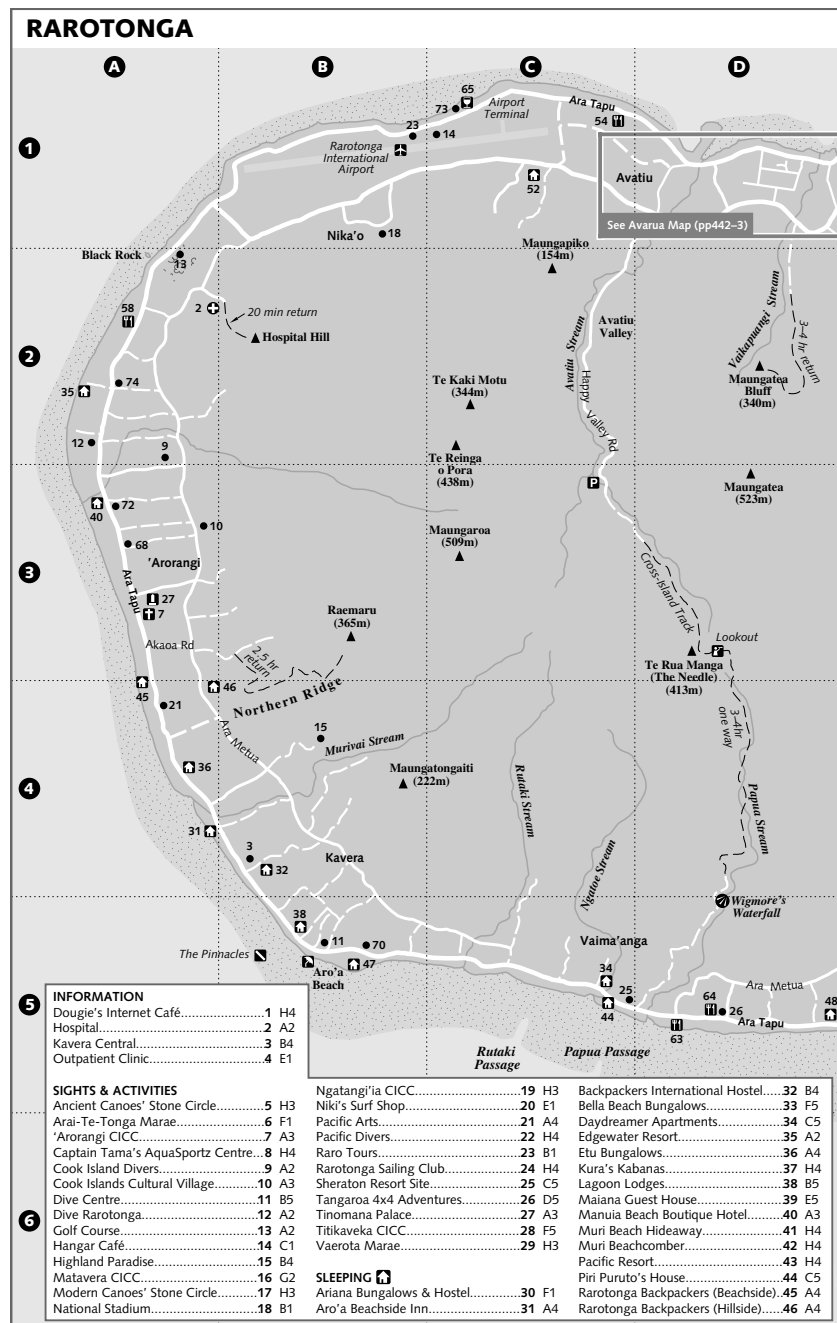
Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels and hostels provide transfers from the airport. **Raro Tours** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25325; coaches@rarotours.co.ck) operates an airport shuttle service (NZ\$10 one way to anywhere on the island).

BUS

Circle-island buses run around the coast road in both directions, departing from the bus stop at Cook's Corner Arcade in Avarua. Daytime buses going clockwise depart hourly from 7am to 4pm Monday to Friday, 1pm to 4pm on Saturday, and from 8am to noon and 2pm to 4pm on Sunday. Buses going anticlockwise depart at 25 minutes past every hour, 8.25am to 4.25pm on Monday to Friday only. A night 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 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 pass, valid for two adults and two kids, costs NZ\$20. There's also a day pass (NZ\$10). The bus can be flagged down anywhere along its route.

You can pick up bus timetables from the tourist office or the bus drivers, or ring **Cook's Passenger Transport** (☎ 25512, after hr ☎ 20349). Several free booklets, including the Jasons *Cook Islands Visitor Guide*, also contain timetables.

CAR, MOPED & BICYCLE

To rent a motor vehicle you'll need a local driving licence (NZ\$10) from the police station in Avarua (Map pp442-3). You'll need to bring your driving licence from home and you'll sometimes have to take a short practical test (usually once around the block). You can get your licence any day from 8am to 3pm, but it pays to turn up early. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road.

Cars and jeeps are available for around NZ\$55 to NZ\$70 per day; ring around for weekly deals. Mountain bikes are around NZ\$6/40 per day/week.

The quintessential mode of transport in the Cook Islands is the scooter. The lowest rates for rental bikes are about NZ\$20/90 per day/week; local firms offer the best deals, but don't expect luxuries such as working speedometers. Take the time to learn how to ride the bike before heading out onto the main road, and watch out for the red-hot exhaust pipe (unless you fancy taking home your own 'Rarotonga tattoo').

Avis Rental Cars Airport (☎ 21039; www.avis.co.ck); Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22833)

BT Rentals (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23586; 'Arorangi)

Budget Rent-a-Car (www.budget.co.ck); airport

(☎ 21039; only open for international flights); Avarua

(Map pp442-3; ☎ 20895; 2 St Joseph Rd); downtown

Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26895); Edgewater Resort

(Map pp438-9; ☎ 21026); Rarotongian Beach Resort (Map

pp438-9; ☎ 20838)

Fun Rentals (☎ 22426; www.funrentals.co.ck) Opposite the airport, this is the only company that offers bubble-shaped 'scooters'.

Island Car & Bike Hire 'Arorangi (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22632; www.islandcarhire.co.ck; Ara Tapu); Avarua (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24632); Muri (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21632)

Rarotonga Rentals (☎ 22326; www.rarotongarentals.co.ck) At the airport.

Tipani Rentals (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22382; 'Arorangi)

TAXI

Rates are about NZ\$2.50 per kilometre; from Muri to the airport will cost NZ\$40.

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

Aroa Taxi Shuttle (☎ 28144; 'Arorangi)

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

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

Muri Beach Taxis (☎ 21625; Muri Beach)

AVARUA

Strung along the island's north coast, Avarua is the only town of any size in the Cook Islands, but we're hardly talking Manhattan – the largest building is barely the height of a coconut tree, and the busiest shops and cafés operate very much on Cook Islands time. Nestled beneath jungle-covered hills and fronted by a glittering bay, Avarua is where you'll find the island's twin harbours and the main market, and there are some intriguing sights, including the National Culture Centre, the ruined Para O Tane Palace and the old Banana Court – once one of the most notorious bars in the South Pacific.

Orientation & Information

Finding your way around Avarua is easy; there's one main road, the Ara Maire Nui, which starts from the main traffic circle near Avarua Harbour and runs right through town. The commercial centre is west of the traffic circle; at the opposite end of town you'll find Punanga Nui market and Avatiu Harbour, where the inter-island passenger freighter ships and Port Authority are based. The airport is 1km further west.

Sights

Just east of the traffic circle is the **seven-in-one coconut tree**, a group of seven coconut trees growing in a perfect circle. Near the traffic circle is the **Philatelic Bureau** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29336), where you can purchase Cook Islands coins and stamps.

On the inland side of the main road, half a block east of the traffic circle, are

the **Para O Tane Palace** and its surrounding area, **Taputapuataea**. The palace is where Makea Takau, the paramount *ariki* of the area, signed the treaty accepting the Cook Islands' status as a British protectorate in 1888. The building is now a picturesque ruin, and it's closed to the public, although officially it's still one of the island's main seats of power.

Further east is the **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu), an excellent craft shop housed in the former LMS Sunday school. You can sometimes visit the workshop here to see black pearl jewellery and shell carvings being made.

On the opposite side of the road is Avarua's white-washed **Cook Islands Christian Church** (CICC; Map pp442-3; Makea Tinirau Rd), built in 1853. The **graveyard** contains a monument to Papeiha and the graves of the author Robert Dean Frisbie (p434) and Albert Henry, the first prime minister of the Cook Islands. The main church service is at 10am on Sunday.

Inland behind the Para O Tane Palace, the **Cook Islands Library & Museum Society** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28468; Makea Tinirau Rd; admission NZ\$2; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 4-8pm Tue) houses a collection of Pacific literature and a small museum, with intriguing exhibits including an old whaling pot, ceremonial spears and the island's first printing press.

The **National Museum** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20725; Victoria Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) inside the National Culture Centre has a selection of Cook Islands and South Pacific artefacts, and it sometimes hosts temporary exhibitions. The **National Library** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20725) is nearby.

AROUND THE ISLAND

The sights listed here are anticlockwise from Avarua, and are all near the main coast road.

Black Rock

On the coast just beyond the golf course is Black Rock (Turou), traditionally believed to be where the spirits of the dead commenced their voyage to 'Avaiki (the afterworld) – though these days it's better known as one of the island's best **snorkelling** spots. Look out for the sign to the Rarotonga Hospital – if you follow the steep road uphill, there are views all along the island's west coast.

LAND OWNERSHIP

Land ownership in the Cook Islands is hereditary and land can only be leased, not sold, to foreigners. Because land is passed from generation to generation, people acquire curiously divided chunks of property; families might have a house by the coast, a citrus plantation somewhere else and the odd grove of papaya trees dotted here and there. It can be a full-time job commuting from one farmlet to another.

Cook Islands Cultural Village

If you're keen to come to grips with the island's pre-Christian past, head for the **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua, 'Arorangi). You'll see demonstrations of traditional skills, including weaving, woodcarving, costume-making and dancing. The daily tours culminate in a cultural show inside the Are Karioi (house of entertainment), followed by a feast of local food, and they usually finish around 1.30pm.

The village tour costs NZ\$56 (NZ\$60 including transfers), or you can combine it with an afternoon circle-island tour for NZ\$85. Children aged five to 12 are half-price. Tours usually run on Monday, Wednesday and Friday – ring in advance to make bookings.

'Arorangi

On Rarotonga's west coast, 'Arorangi was the first missionary-built village, conceived as a model for other villages on the island. The missionary Papeiha is buried at the 1849 CICC. Rising up behind 'Arorangi is the flat-topped peak of Raemaru (365m).

There are several interesting art galleries in 'Arorangi, including **Pacific Arts** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20200; merkens@oyster.net.ck; Ara Tapu) and the **Art Studio** (☎ 22510; ikgeorge@oyster.net.ck).

Highland Paradise

High above 'Arorangi, **Highland Paradise** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 24477; tours adult/6-12/under 6 NZ\$50/25/free) stands on the site of the old Tinomana village. Members of the Pirangi family, descendants of Tinomana Ariki, take visitors on a two-hour tour of the site, including the

[illegible]

ANZ Bank.....	1 E1
Bounty Bookshop.....	(see 7)
CITC Pharmacy.....	(see 39)
Cook Islands Library & Museum Society.....	2 F2
Cook Islands Tourist Authority.....	3 E1
Cybernet.ck.....	(see 33)
Internet Shop.....	4 F1
Island Hopper Vacations.....	(see 33)
Jetsave Travel.....	(see 41)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration.....	5 E1
National Culture Centre.....	(see 17)
New Zealand High Commission.....	(see 7)
Philatelic Bureau.....	(see 7)
Police Station.....	6 E1
Post Office.....	7 F1
Snowbird Laundromat.....	8 B1
Telecom.....	9 E2
Telepost.....	(see 39)
University of the South Pacific (USP).....	10 G1
Westpac Bank.....	11 E1

Avarua CICC.....	12	G1
Cook Islands Whale Education Centre.....	13	A2
Dive Shop Avarua.....	14	D1
National Auditorium.....	15	G1
National Library.....	16	G1
National Museum.....	17	G1

The south coast of Rarotonga has the island's best **beaches**, with long stretches of brilliant white sand, overhanging palms

Papeiha Stone.....	18
Para O Tane Palace.....	19
Punanga Nui Market.....	20
Raro Eco Tours.....	21
Raro Mountain Safari Tours....(see)	
St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral.....	22
Seven-in-One Coconut Tree.....	23

Paradise Inn.....24
Rarotonga Realty.....25
Shekinah Homes.....(see 2

EATING

Aramoana Fish & Chips.....	26
Blue Note Café.....(see	
Café.....	27
Café Salsa.....(see	
Foodland Supermarket.....(see	
Mama's Café.....	28
Palace Takeaways.....	29
Paulina's Polynesian Restaurant.....	30
Portofino.....	31
Trader Jack's.....	32

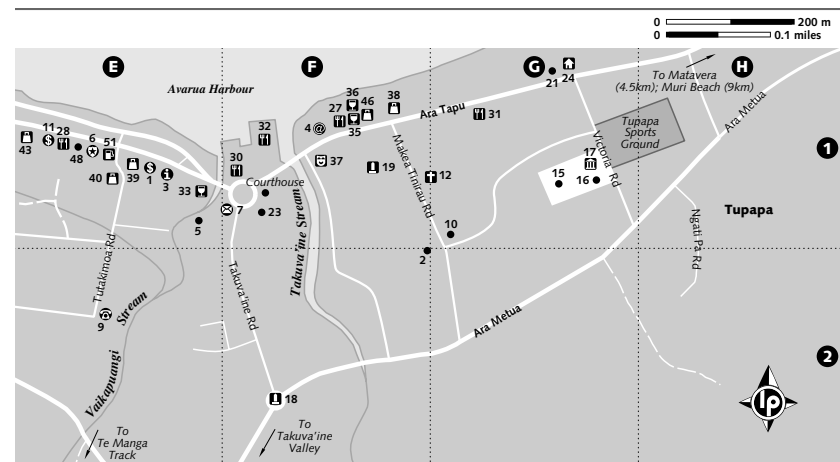
Banana Court Bar.....	33
Banana Court.....	(see 3)
CocoBar.....	34
Hideaway Bar.....	(see 4)
Staircase Restaurant & Bar.....	(see 4)
TJ's Nightclub.....	35
Whatever Bar & Grill.....	36

ENTERTAINMENT 
 Empire Cinema.....**37** F1

Arasena Gallery.....	(see 33)
Beachcomber Gallery.....	38 F1
Bergman & Sons.....	(see 33)
Crafts Store.....	(see 33)
Bergman & Sons.....	(see 40)
Pearl Store.....	(see 40)
Bus Stop.....	(see 40)
CITC Shopping Centre.....	39 E1
Cook's Corner Arcade.....	40 E1
Goldmine.....	41 D1
Island Craft.....	(see 43)
Kenwall Gallery.....	42 D1
Mareko.....	43 E1
Mike Tavioni's Workshop.....	44 A1
Moana Gems.....	(see 39)
Perfume Factory.....	45 D2
Perfumes of Rarotonga.....	(see 40)
Tuki's Pareu.....	46 F1
Vonnia's Store.....	(see 41)

Avis Rental Cars.....	(see 39)
Budget Rent-a-Car.....	47 D1
Budget Rent-a-Car Downtown Office.....	48 E1
Harbour Master.....	49 C1
Island Car & Bike Hire.....	50 C1
Petrol Station.....	51 E1
Ports Authority.....	(see 49)

On the eastern edge of the abandoned Sheraton resort site, a road leads inland to **Wigmore's Waterfall**, a lovely cascade dropping into a fresh, cool swimming pool (though it dries up to a disappointing trickle in hot weather).



The most beautiful section of Rarotonga's encircling lagoon is found at Muri, on the southeastern corner of the island. The water is dazzlingly blue and the lagoon is packed with tropical fish, especially around the four small *motu* (islets in a lagoon) out towards the reef: Taakoka, Koromiri, Oneroa and Motutapu. Taakoka is volcanic; the others are sand cays. Water-sports equipment (p445) and lagoon cruises are available from Muri through Captain Tama's and Reef to See (p445).

Start on the north side of Muri Beach at **Avana Harbour**, one of the only deepwater passages into Rarotonga's lagoon. It was from here that the great ocean-going *vaka* set off in the 14th century to settle NZ – the so-called 'Great Migration'. Slightly to the north on a promontory of land is **Marae Vaerota**, the traditional *marae* of the Kainuku Ariki, where the canoes were blessed and human sacrifices were made to the gods.

Head south and look out for the picturesque **Ngatangia CICC**, where you'll find some interesting headstones. In the park opposite you'll find the ancient **canoes' stone circle** and a plaque commemorating the seven canoes that completed the journey to NZ: *Takitumu, Tokomaru, Kurahaupo, Aotea, Tainui, Te Arawa and Mataatua*. Further south, a modern **stone circle** commemorates

South of here is **Muri Beach**, one of the island's best snorkelling areas. Head along the shoreline and gaze out to the four palm-covered **motu** in the lagoon; Motutapu is the furthest north, with Oneroa, Koromiri and little Taakoka to the south. The remains of one of Rarotonga's oldest **marae** can be found on Motutapu, but you'll need to hire a kayak (see p445) if you want to see it. Pick up some light refreshment at **Sails Restaurant** (p451) or the **Barefoot Bar** at the Pacific Resort (p449), then head down the main road to **Shells & Craft** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22275) to see some truly spectacular conch shells.

The old **CICC** here is lovely at night when the outside is lit up. **Perfumes of Rarotonga** (see p453) concocts perfumes, liqueurs and colognes, and there's a pottery shop at the rear.

A small sign points off the road to the island's most important **marae** site, Ara'i-Te-Tonga. Just off the Ara Metua there's a stone-marked *koutu* (ancient open-air royal courtyard) site in front of you. This whole area was a gathering place and the remains of the *marae*, the *koutu* and other meeting grounds are still visible.

Cross-Island Track

This three- to four-hour hike, from the north to south coasts via the 413m **Te Rua Manga** (Needle), is the most popular walk on Rarotonga, passing through some of the island's most impressive natural scenery. You shouldn't try to do the walk in a north-south direction, as the chances of taking a wrong turn are much greater. Wear adequate shoes, take plenty of drinking water and lather on the mosquito repellent. Parts of the walk get extremely slippery in wet weather.

You can take a guided tour (p446), but it's perfectly possible to do the walk on your own. The road to the starting point starts south of Avatiu Harbour. Continue on the road up the valley by Avatiu Stream until you reach a sign announcing the beginning of the walk. A private vehicle road continues for about 1km.

A footpath takes off from the end of the vehicle road, and after 10 minutes drops down and crosses a small stream. Avoid following the white plastic power-cable track up the valley; instead, pick up the track beside the massive boulder on the ridge to your left, after the stream crossing.

From here, the track climbs steeply to the Needle (about 45 minutes). At the first sight of the Needle there's a boulder in the middle of the path – a nice place for a rest. A little further on is a T-junction; the Needle is a 10-minute walk to the right. Don't try and climb up to the Needle itself, as there have been several recent rockfalls and landslides, and there's a long and probably fatal drop on either side of the trail. Follow the track round to the left instead, and you'll begin the long, slippery descent towards the south coast.

After 30 minutes the track meets the Papua Stream and follows it downhill, zigzagging back and forth across the stream. After about 45 minutes, the track emerges into fernland. Be sure to stick to the main track; there are several places where minor tracks seem to take off towards the stream but these end at dangerous spots upstream from the waterfall. Another 15 minutes further on, the main track turns back towards the stream, bringing you to the bottom of **Wigmore's Waterfall** (beware the bloodthirsty mosquitoes). A dirt road leads from the south coast up to the waterfall. It's about a 15-minute walk to the coast road, where you can flag down the circle-island bus or cool off in the nearby lagoon.

ACTIVITIES Deep-Sea Fishing

Deep-sea fishing is popular in the Cook Islands, with catches of *mahimahi* fish and tuna (from October to May), wahoo and barracuda (April to October), and sailfish and marlin (November to March). Compare charters and ask beforehand whether you can keep your fish. All of the following operators have safety gear. It's best to contact them by telephone as many of them are run from the owners' homes.

Akura Charters (☎ 54355; fish@akura.co.ck)

Fisher's Fishin' Tourz (☎ 23356, 55154; bafisher@oyster.net.ck)

Hook Fishing Charters (☎ 54475; hookfish@pacificmotors.co.ck)

Pacific Marine Charters (☎ 21237; www.pacificmarinecharters.co.ck)

Seafari Charters (☎ 20328, 55096; www.seafari.co.ck)

Diving

Diving is fantastic outside the reef, especially around the passages along the island's southern side. There are canyons, caves and tunnels to explore, and outside the lagoon the island drops off to around 4000m, although most diving is between 3m to 30m.

Rarotonga has several well-preserved shipwrecks, including the SS *Maitai* off the northern shore. Other well-known diving spots include Black Rock in the north; Sandriver and Matavera Wall on the island's east side; and the Ayaavaroa, Papua and Rutaki passages in the south.

Rarotonga has four accredited diving operators, all offering twice-daily boat trips. Single dives cost NZ\$70 to NZ\$75, including gear. Introductory dives and diving courses are also available.

Cook Island Divers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22483; www.cookislandsdivers.com; 'Arorangi)

Dive Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20238; www.thedivecentre-rarotonga.com; Aro'a Beach)

Dive Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21873; www.dive-rarotonga.com; 'Arorangi)

Pacific Divers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22450; www.pacificdivers.co.ck; Muri Beach)

Hiking

The island's mountainous centre is criss-crossed by some stunning walking tracks and trails. The top walk is the **Cross-Island Track** (left), but there are lots of others to

discover. The best guide is *Rarotonga's Mountain Tracks and Plants* by Gerald McCormack and Judith Künzlé, also the authors of the trusty handbook *Rarotonga's Cross-Island Walk*.

Wear light, breathable clothing, sturdy boots, and check the weather forecast before you go. Tell someone where you're headed and what time you expect to return – and whatever you do, remember your mosquito repellent.

Horse Riding

Horse-riding tours are offered by **Aroa Pony Trek** (☎ 21415; adult/child NZ\$50/30; ☎ mornings & afternoons Mon-Fri) along the beach, up to Wigmore's Waterfall, then back again; they usually last around 2½ hours. Bookings are essential.

Sailing & Water Sports

Muri Lagoon is the best place for swimming, windsurfing, sailing and kayaking. Sailing races start at Muri Beach every Saturday and Sunday afternoon from around 1pm. Kayaks are readily available, and many hotels provide them for guests' use. They're easy to handle and great fun, and ideal for exploring the deserted *motu* on Muri Lagoon.

The **Rarotonga Sailing Club** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27349; Muri Beach) rents kayaks (NZ\$5/10 for one/three hours) and small sailing boats (NZ\$35/100 for one/three hours).

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) is beside the Rarotonga Sailing Club and rents kayaks (singles/doubles NZ\$7/10 per hour) and sailboards (NZ\$25 per hour).

Snorkelling & Swimming

Rarotonga's spectacular lagoon is fantastic for snorkelling and swimming – it's crystal-clear, bath-warm and packed with technicolour fish and bright coral. The beaches along the island's southern and western sides are all good for swimming, but on the northern and eastern sides, the reef is too close to shore and swimming is not recommended. The best snorkelling is around Muri Lagoon, Aro'a Beach, Titikaveka and Tikioki in the south of the island, and Black Rock in the north. Many of these areas are protected by *ra'ui* (traditional conservation areas).

THE COCONUT KING

Rarotonga's best-known showman, **Piri Puruto III** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20309), is still zipping up coconut trees, conjuring fire from dry twigs, and cooking up island feasts for his guests, despite the fact that he's now well into his sixties. The show costs NZ\$15 and runs several nights a week, and Piri also lays on a traditional *umukai* on Sunday that you can help prepare (NZ\$49). Children get in to all Piri's activities for half price.

Snorkelling gear is available from the island's diving operators (see opposite); some hotels also provide free gear for guests' use. The **Dive Shop Avarua** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24496; Mana Court, Avarua) sells good-quality fins, masks and snorkels. **Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach), beside the Rarotonga Sailing Club, has snorkelling gear for hire.

Reef to See (☎ 22212; reef2see@oyster.net.ck) offers twice-daily snorkelling trips at 9am and 2pm (NZ\$50). It's best to call ahead to book your place.

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. The main spots are at Avana Harbour, Matavera and Black Rock. **Niki's Surf Shop** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26240; www.cookislandsurf.co.ck; Ara Tapu), east of Avarua, sells surfing supplies (mostly après-surf), but you'll need to bring your own board.

Other Sports

You can usually find a **volleyball** game on Muri Beach or at the Rarotongian Beach Resort (p449). **Tennis** courts are available at Edgewater Resort and Rarotongian Beach Resort.

Rarotonga's nine-hole **golf course** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20621; http://rarotonga.nzgolfclub.net; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, members only Sat) is near the airport.

RAROTONGA FOR CHILDREN

The top draw for kids is the island's colourful lagoon and the spectacular beach that stretches around the island. Top spots for snorkelling are Muri, Tikioki and Aro'a

Beach – smoothies and ice creams are never far away at Fruits of Rarotonga (p450) and the Saltwater Café (p450). For an in-depth look at the island's underwater inhabitants, kids will adore Captain Tama's glass-bottom boats (below) or the semisubmersible Reef Sub (below), which both chug around Muri Lagoon – they might even spot some humpback whales if you're visiting between July and October.

Active kids will love exploring the island's jungle-covered interior, especially in the company of Pa Teurua (right), the Cook Islands equivalent of Indiana Jones. Pa offers informative nature walks as well as guided tours across the island. Alternatively, you could try a bike-and-canoe trek up the Avana Valley with Raro Eco Tours (right) or a jeep-ride around the island with Tangaroa 4x4 Adventures (opposite). Then how about a traditional Sunday *umukai* with the venerable Piri Puruto III (p445), accompanied by his world-famous coconut show? By bedtime the kids will be out like a light...

TOURS

Glass-Bottom Boat Tours

Captain Tama's AquaSportz Centre (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27350; Muri Beach) operates glass-bottom boat tours (adult/child NZ\$60/35), including snorkelling and a barbecue lunch on Koromiri. The tours last from 11am to about 3pm and run Monday to Saturday. Bookings are essential.

The semisubmersible **Reef Sub** (☎ 25837) allows you to explore the ocean depths without having to get wet (very Jules Verne); you'll have close-up views of coral, fish, turtles and even the occasional shark. Ninety-minute cruises depart at 10am and 2pm daily from Avatiu Harbour (adult/child NZ\$65/35). Whale-watching trips are available in season (July to October).

Scenic Flights

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) offers 20-minute scenic flights (adult/child NZ\$65/35), complete with onboard commentary. Flights take place from 8.30am to 4pm daily.

The **Hangar Café** (☎ 25317, 55311) offers tandem microlight flights (NZ\$145). You'll need a decent standard of fitness (no pacemakers) and a head for heights.

Walking Tours

Pa's Mountain Walk (☎ 21079; tours adult/child NZ\$65/35) offers guided tours along the cross-island track. The tours are run by dreadlocked Pa Teurua – herbalist, botanist and traditional healer. Pa's cross-island walk runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (weather permitting), and he conducts nature walks on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The **Takitumu Conservation Area** (TCA; Map pp438-9; ☎ 29906; kakerori@tca.co.ck; Ara Tapu, Avarua) is a private forest reserve in Rarotonga's southeast corner. There are guided tours around the reserve (adult/child NZ\$50/30), and you're almost guaranteed to catch sight of the endangered *kakerori*.

Whale-Watching

Humpback whales visit the Cook Islands from July to October. Most dive operators and fishing charters, as well as the Reef Sub, offer whale-watching trips in season. The **Cook Islands Whale Education Centre** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21666; www.whaleresearch.org; Ara Metua, Atupa) has plenty of information about whales, including the best time to see them.

Other Tours

There are plenty of organised tours on Rarotonga. 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.

The **Cook Islands Cultural Village** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21314; www.cookislandsculturalvillage.com; Ara Metua, 'Arorangi) offers a circle-island historical tour which includes an island-style buffet and cultural show. 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 (combined tour NZ\$85).

Raro Mountain Safari Tours (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23629; www.rarosafaritours.co.ck; opposite Punanga Nui Market) runs three-hour expeditions (adult/child NZ\$60/30) around the island's rugged mountains, inland valleys and historical points of interest in safari-style jeeps. Tours run Monday to Friday at 9am and 1.30 pm, and at noon on Sunday.

Raro Eco Tours (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26270, 54555; raroeco-tours@oyster.net.ck) offers a brace of eco-tours delving into Rarotonga's natural environment. The minibus tour along the Ara Metua focuses on local plants, traditional

medicine and cultural sites (NZ\$50). A second tour explores the lush Avana valley by bike and kayak (NZ\$35). You'll probably get wet and muddy on this trip, so wear old clothes. Tours run Monday to Saturday.

Tangaroa 4x4 Adventures (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22200; Ara Tapu, Vaima'anga) runs a whistlestop tour of the island's main attractions, including the inland road, Avana Harbour, eastern heights, *marae*, library, power station and even the Rarotongan prison. The three-hour tours run from Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday afternoon (adult/child NZ\$60/30).

SLEEPING

Rarotonga has a wide variety of places to stay, ranging from budget hostels to seriously swanky boutique hotels. Muri Beach and the southern coast is the area to choose if you're looking for the classic Cook Islands setting (palm trees, blue lagoons, soft-sand beaches). If you want to see the sunset from your hotel, then west is best (of course). Unsurprisingly, wherever you stay on Rarotonga, you'll pay a premium for picture-postcard views.

A good way to cut costs is to do your own cooking. Most accommodation places have kitchen facilities, except the large resorts and a few upmarket hotels, where you'll need to factor in eating out as an extra expense. Almost everywhere has laundry facilities available for guests.

Budget

AVARUA

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

Tiare Village Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23466; www.tiavillage.co.ck; dm/s/d/poolside units NZ\$20/25/45/70; ☎ ☎) Tucked away near the airport, this hostel is a long-standing favourite for budget travellers. The small dorms inside the large main house share a kitchen, bathroom and lounge; outside there are three self-contained (and rather poky) A-frame chalets and several poolside units.

Ariana Bungalows & Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20521; relax@ariana.co.ck; dm/s/d NZ\$18/30/40, 1-3-person bungalows NZ\$60-65; ☎) An excellent option if you're on a tight budget, Ariana Bungalows offers bog-standard dorm beds and pleasant self-contained bungalows, all centred around a swimming pool and a leafy tropical garden. There's a small

TIARE MAORI

The Cook Islands' national flower is the *tiare Maori*, or gardenia. Gardenia flowers are often worn as a decorative ornament or woven into floral 'ei, and you might also see them worn behind the ear, especially at a bar or a village dance – a flower behind the right ear means the person is spoken for, while a blossom behind the left ear means they're still available.

on-site shop for groceries and beer. The hostel is 3km east of Avarua, so you'll need a scooter.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Rarotonga Backpackers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21590; www.rarotongabackpackers.com; hillside dm NZ\$20, s NZ\$35-45, tw NZ\$45-50, bungalows NZ\$70-85, beachfront rooms s NZ\$45, d NZ\$55-65, houses NZ\$110-120) Built over several levels, this quirky hostel looks like Tarzan's treehouse transplanted to Rarotonga. The dorms and rooms are all set around a central pool, and there are several self-contained units with private verandas overlooking the coast. A second outpost has just opened in 'Arorangi, with a main house and a couple of sumptuous beachfront bungalows.

Etu Bungalows (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25588; www.etu-bungalows.com; bungalows NZ\$90) Peacefully positioned on the island's sunset side, these rustic garden bungalows are a super option if you're on a tight budget. All the units have a roomy open-plan interior, high ceilings and plenty of light; each also has a private trellised porch and a small box-style bathroom. The wood-panelled walls, potted plants and gorgeous garden views all add nicely to the tropical South Pacific feel.

Vara's (Map pp438-9; ☎ 23156; www.varas.co.ck; dm/s NZ\$25/40, d NZ\$55-80, units NZ\$120-140) Perched right on Muri Beach, Vara's (in)famous beach-house has acquired a reputation for overcrowding, late-night revelry and lacklustre management; those seeking South Seas tranquillity should definitely look elsewhere. The beachside dorms are cramped and the self-contained units are pricey – for better value (and great views) head for the hillside lodge beside the main office.

Backpackers International Hostel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21847; www.backpackersinternational.com; dm/s/d NZ\$18/30/40) This venerable hostel has undergone a recent facelift, though it's still a touch institutional. The upstairs rooms are plain and boxy, but comfortable enough in a boarding-school kind of way. Downstairs there's a kitchen and a jazzily painted lounge leading onto a small garden, where there's a popular weekly island barbecue (NZ\$20/25 for guests/nonguests). Rates are discounted for longer stays.

Rau's Guesthouse (☎ 22916; www.rauguesthouse.co.ck; s/d NZ\$50/60) This newly opened hostel is more a homestay than a traditional backpackers'. The clean, affordable rooms inside the single-storey guesthouse share a spotlessly clean kitchen and lounge; there's also a lovely beach just across the main road.

Maiana Guest House (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20438; www.maianaguesthouse.co.ck; dm/s/tw/d/tr NZ\$22/35/45/50/60, bungalow NZ\$170) A friendly and popular hostel opposite Turoa Beach. The rooms are spartan and a touch scruffy in places, but the kitchen, lounge and dining room are well kitted out.

Midrange

The midrange price bracket is where you'll find most accommodation on Rarotonga, ranging from budget motel units to plush beachside bungalows. If you're travelling with kids, make sure you check the hotel's policy on young children before booking. Many properties won't accept children under 12 years old.

AVARUA

Paradise Inn (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20544; www.paradiseinn.rarotonga.com; s NZ\$65-85, d/tr/f NZ\$105/125/135; ☎) This quirky hotel was once Rarotonga's largest and liveliest dance hall; these days it's been lovingly converted to provide snug, good-value accommodation, including several split-level rooms with a funky loft-style sleeping area. The old building is packed with character; there's a huge lounge decked out with polished-wood floors, nautical knick-knacks and an honesty bar, and outside there's a fine sea-view veranda.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Kura's Kabanais (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27010; www.kkabanais.co.ck; studios NZ\$180, kabanais NZ\$200) If you're looking for an idyllic location, complete

with shady palms, lagoon views and a glorious china-white beach just steps from your door, then Kura's Kabanais won't disappoint. Tucked away in a secluded grove, the three timber-framed bungalows are tastefully decorated and have lovely outside porticos, complete with wooden furniture and an ocean outlook.

Aro'a Beachside Inn (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22166; www.aaroabeach.com; garden studio s/d NZ\$160/220, beachside deluxe s/d NZ\$330/350) A top choice for romantic walks and sunset views. The best units are the smartly decorated 'honeymoon suites' beside the beach; some guests have complained that the sea is 'too noisy' (which gives you an idea of just how near the sand these units are). If your budget is tight, the three garden bungalows are more affordable and still only a stone's throw from the sand.

Muri Beach Hideaway (Map pp438-9; ☎ 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. The stylish hillside cottage is a steal at NZ\$180.

Lagoon Lodges (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22020; www.lagoonlodges.com; studio units NZ\$195, 1-bedroom bungalows NZ\$220, 2-bedroom standard/deluxe villas NZ\$270/320, 3-bedroom lodge NZ\$465; ☎) Choose from 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. The 'at-ground' bungalows offer the best-value, especially for families, with large verandas and your own virtually private garden.

Bella Beach Bungalows (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26004; helenura@shekinah.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$170) These four stained-timber units stand on stilts beside the beach and boast 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 a sleeping area that can be screened off with sliding doors.

Daydreamer Apartments (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25965; www.daydreamer.co.ck; s/d units NZ\$120/150) Probably the best value accommodation along the south coast, if you can live without being

directly on 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 well-tended tropical garden.

Muri Beachcomber (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21022; www.beachcomber.co.ck; sea-view units s/d/tr NZ\$240/260/340, watergarten villas s/d/tr NZ\$310/330/410; ☎) There's a homely, almost villagey feel to this place, which offers a choice of sea-view units 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 green space between the bungalows.

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 'early-bird' (usually 30 days) discounts and multnight packages.

Royale Takitumu Villas (Map pp438-9; ☎ 24682; www.takitumuvillas.co.ck; bungalows NZ\$450-540; ☎) A lovely, secluded little hideaway along the South Coast, offering 10 luxurious thatched villas set among lush gardens and lily ponds. The tastefully understated

interiors and grand spa baths cater to an unashamedly upmarket clientele; if you can afford the hefty price tag, Takitumu is hard to top in terms of style and service.

Pacific Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20427; www.pacificresort.com; villas NZ\$340-1200; ☎ ☎ ☎) Situated right on Muri Beach, and shaded by overhanging palm trees, the 64 self-contained units at this popular resort are smart, elegant and unfussy, making use of local materials and traditional building styles; the best have sitting rooms and private verandas. There are loads of on-site facilities including two eateries – the beachfront Barefoot Bar and the open-air Sandals Restaurant.

Sokala Villas (Map pp438-9; ☎ 29200; www.sokala.com; NZ\$390-690; ☎) If you're looking for the perfect balance between style, atmosphere and cost, then look no further than Sokala Villas. Lovingly built from native woods 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 lagoon views. All the villas have secluded sun decks, some with seriously romantic private swimming pools.

Rarotonga's two large resorts are high on price and thin on charm, but they're a good option for travelling families, especially if you're looking for resort-style facilities.

Rarotongan Beach Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25800; www.rarotongan.co.ck; garden/beachfront r NZ\$380/410, st NZ\$400-730, honeymoon bungalow NZ\$640; ☎) This is probably the busiest 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 and suites continue the tropical theme.

Edgewater Resort (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25435; www.edgewater.co.ck; garden/superior/beachfront/beachfront deluxe/VIP ste NZ\$240/280/380/420/550, 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. 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 unashamedly modern furniture.

Manuia Beach Boutique Hotel (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22461; www.manuia.co.ck; garden d/tr NZ\$370/480, beachfront d/tr NZ\$540/650; ☎ ☎) This boutique

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Sea Change (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22532; www.sea-change-rarotonga.com; villas NZ\$430-1020; ☎) Polynesian setting meets European style in these impeccably appointed villas, all traditionally thatched, lavishly equipped and free-standing. The interior design is more South Kensington than South Pacific (luxury king-size four-poster beds, home-entertainment systems, flat-screen TVs and private outdoor pools). The open-plan villas are effortlessly chic, using earthy tones and traditional materials to offset the more contemporary design elements. The garden villas aren't quite as jaw-droppingly gorgeous as their seafarer cousins, but they still manage to make most other places look downright dowdy. Sea Change is rather like a Rarotongan supermodel – unquestionably elegant and irresistibly attractive, but darned expensive.

hotel was battered by the 2005 hurricanes but has since undergone massive refurbishment, with a brand-new open-air dining room (see opposite), 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.

Long-Term Rental

Renting a house is often the best-value way to visit the island, especially for families. Fully furnished two-bedroom houses cost around NZ\$250 to NZ\$400 per week.

Jetsave Travel (Map pp442-3; ☎ 27707; www.jetsave.co.uk; Ara Māire Nui, Avarua)

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

Rarotonga Realty (Map pp442-3; ☎/fax 26664; www.rarotonga.co.uk; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

Shekinah Homes (Map pp442-3; ☎/fax 26004; www.shekinah.co.uk; Ara Tapu, Avarua)

EATING

There's a wide choice of restaurants on Rarotonga, from European fine dining to fish and chips. Most top-end hotels have an in-house restaurant that's also open to nonguests.

Cafés & Quick Eats

There are several good cafés scattered around the island serving coffee, cakes and light lunches, and plenty of rock-bottom budget takeaway stalls in Avarua for late-night burgers and post-pub grub.

AVARUA & AROUND

Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21283; Ara Tapu; cakes & muffins NZ\$2-5, lunch from NZ\$8; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) The choicest of several great cafés in Avarua, serving up the best fresh-roasted cappuccinos and lattes on the island. A great spot to kick back, read the papers and tuck into an early-morning muffin before heading into town.

Blue Note Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23236; breakfast NZ\$8-17, mains NZ\$8-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A colourful open-air café-bar next door to the Banana Court, which is as good for mid-morning coffee as for late-afternoon lunch. Tasty salads, burgers, curries and sandwiches are all on the eclectic menu, and there's a selection of daily-changing specials.

Mama's Café (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23379; Ara Māire Nui; sandwiches NZ\$4-6, cooked breakfasts & main meals NZ\$7-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This cut-price café beside the Foodland supermarket is always jam-packed with locals tucking into a hearty cooked breakfast and a mug of coffee, especially on market day. It's popular for cheap hot lunches, sandwiches and homemade ice cream.

Palace Takeaways (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21438; Avatiu Harbour; burgers NZ\$4-8, meals NZ\$10-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) The top takeaway in Avarua, serving massive burgers and similar fast-food fare from a roadside stall beside Avatiu Harbour.

Just Burgers (Map pp438-9; ☎ 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.

Aramoana Fish & Chips (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21250; NZ\$7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Right beside Avatiu Harbour.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Māire Nui Gardens & Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22796; cakes from NZ\$3; light lunches from NZ\$7-15; ☺ Mon-Fri) A glorious café on the southern side of the island, with a thatched terrace offering views over botanical grounds and tranquil lily ponds. Owner Hinano MacQuarie's homemade cakes and afternoon teas are well known all over the island, and afterwards you can take a relaxing stroll around the gardens (NZ\$3).

Fruits of Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21509; light breakfasts NZ\$3-5; ☺ Mon-Sat) Homemade jams and tropical-flavoured chutneys (from NZ\$3.60) are divine at this little shop opposite Tikioki beach, but it's good for smoothies, cakes and fruit juices too. The owners will gladly guard your stuff while you check out the snorkelling in the lagoon opposite the café.

Saltwater Café (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20020; ☺ lunch & dinner Sun-Fri) Another popular beach-style hang-out on the island's south coast, offering inexpensive food and delicious shakes and smoothies in a great location in Titikaveka.

Café Maori (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20012; snacks NZ\$3.50-15) Beside the grocery store in Kavera, this vividly coloured roadside café is a decent option for burgers, sandwiches and breakfasts.

Restaurants

AVARUA & AROUND

Trader Jack's (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26464; www.traderjacks.co.uk; starters NZ\$12-16, mains NZ\$11-25, platters NZ\$50) Long a favourite haunt for Rarotonga's smart set, Trader Jack's was all but wiped out by the 2005 cyclones, and though the old ramshackle charm may have disappeared into the lagoon, the bar and restaurant have taken the opportunity for a complete overhaul. The nautical-themed restaurant offers top-notch fish dishes and super-sized seafood platters.

Café Salsa (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22215; mains NZ\$8-25; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat) More Auckland-chic than island-style, this vibrant café-restaurant is one of Avarua's hottest spots for lunch, with a varied menu and a huge specials board, ranging from Caesar salads and Cajun-style chicken to wood-fired pizzas.

Portofino (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26480; Ara Tapu; pasta NZ\$18-25, pizza NZ\$16-27, mains NZ\$25-35; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) Rarotonga has a surprising number of Italian restaurants, but Portofino is the oldest and still the best. Traditional pastas and pizzas are served in the relaxed, pastel-coloured dining room, or you can have takeaways delivered anywhere on the island.

Paulina's Polynesian Restaurant (Map pp442-3; ☎ 28889; burgers NZ\$4-8, mains NZ\$7-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) If you're after traditional Polynesian cooking in Avarua, Paulina's is about the

only place you'll find it. Don't expect fine dining – it's more an open-air roadside diner than a restaurant – but classic recipes including *ika mata*, *eke* (curried octopus) and coconut chicken are always available.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Vaima Restaurant & Bar (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26123; starters NZ\$8-15, mains NZ\$24-30) This family-run restaurant is by far our favourite place on the south coast, with a delightful island-themed dining room (complete with split bamboo walls and traditional art), a beachfront patio and breezy outside terrace. You won't find fresher fish or better food anywhere on the island.

Flame Tree (Map pp438-9; ☎ 25123; www.flame-treerestaurant.com; starters NZ\$9-14, mains NZ\$21-38; ☺ dinner) Another renowned restaurant on Rarotonga's southern side, perhaps not quite as impressive as it was during its heyday, but still highly recommended. There's an attractive outside courtyard and a more formal dining room inside, but it's the top-notch food and pan-global flavours that pull the punters in.

Kikau Hut (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26860; starters NZ\$9-17, mains NZ\$22-28; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) This circular, candlelit restaurant in 'Arorangi' specialises in relaxed international dining. There's regular live entertainment courtesy of local bands, and the atmosphere is on the easy side – leave the black tie at home.

Right on the Beach Bar & Restaurant (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22461; lunch NZ\$12-25, dinner NZ\$24-28; ☺ lunch & dinner) Huddled under a thatched canopy, this beachfront restaurant trumpets itself as the only place where you can indulge in fine-dining cuisine and feel the sand between your toes. The twice-weekly island night and buffet is understandably popular – book well ahead.

Pawpaw Patch (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27189; mains NZ\$23-28; ☺ breakfast & dinner) With its bold primary colours and brasserie atmosphere, the excellent restaurant at the Moana Sands hotel brings metropolitan style to the south coast of Rarotonga. The menu is eclectic and inventive – Fijian-style curries sit alongside gourmet kebabs and pan-fried fish – and there's a weekly barbecue.

Sails Restaurant (Map pp438-9; ☎ 27349; lunch NZ\$7-22, dinner mains NZ\$18-30, desserts NZ\$8) This lively oceanfront bistro-bar is equally adept at serving up light bites for lunch as heartier

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Tamarind House (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26487; www.tamarind.co.uk; starters NZ\$12-25, mains NZ\$25-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) Rarotonga's top chef, Sue Carruthers, founded her reputation at the Flame Tree, but she's now taken up residence in this sweeping colonial-style building on the island's north shore. Book your table on the grand veranda and sit back for the finest food on Rarotonga. Sue combines the freshest island ingredients with delicious European-inspired cuisine. The atmosphere is elegant and classically South Seas – you half-expect to see Somerset Maugham sipping a good claret and scribbling away at a nearby table. Smart, sophisticated and simply scrumptious.

ISLAND NIGHTS

If there's one thing you *have* to check out on Rarotonga, 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 the island. Dancing, drumming, close harmony singing and coconut husking are always on the itinerary, but fire-juggling, acrobatics and storytelling are often thrown into the mix.

Island nights are held regularly at all the large resorts, including the Rarotongan Beach Resort (p449), the Edgewater (p449) and the Pacific Resort (p449). You'll 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 & Bar (below), costing NZ\$25 including food or NZ\$5 for the show only. Ask at the tourist authority for island night timetables.

evening meals. It's especially popular with holidaying yachties and beach bums – the island's sailing club is right opposite, and the open-air terrace looks right over nearby Muri Lagoon.

Self-Catering

The best (and cheapest) supermarkets are both in Avarua.

Foodland (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23378; Ara Māire Nui; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) The best all-round supermarket, with fresh bread, fruit and vegetables, packaged goods and a deli counter.

CITC Supermarket (Map pp438-9; ☎ 22000; Ara Tapu; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) Halfway to the airport from Avarua, CITC is good for tinned and packaged produce, but the range of fresh goods is pretty slim.

Wigmore's Superstore (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20206; ☎ 6am-9pm) The only proper grocery store on the south coast, but prices are much 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 is a great place to pick up fresh produce – Saturday is the best day to go for food, but you'll need to get there early. And look out for the roadside stalls where you can often pick up bags of fresh veg for much less than in the supermarkets.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Bars & Nightclubs

The big night out on Rarotonga is Friday, but Saturday is quickly catching up in popularity. On Friday most places stay open till around 2am; on Saturday the doors are banged shut at the stroke of midnight to avoid high-jinks on the Sabbath.

Most restaurants have small in-house bars where you can drop by for a quiet drink. Resort bars are open to nonguests, but they're a pricey place for a tipple.

There are several organised pub-crawls of the island's main night-spots, including the **Friday Night Life Tour** (☎ 25435) at the Edgewater Resort and the **Nitelife Tour** (☎ 25800) at the Rarotongan Beach Resort, which come complete with minibuses and stone-cold sober driver. Several hostels, including **Aremango Guesthouse** (☎ 24362) and **Backpackers International Hostel** (Map pp438-9; ☎ 21847) run less-organised (and rather less genteel) Friday-night tours.

AVARUA & AROUND

The main after-dark action is centred on Avarua.

Whatever Bar & Grill (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22299; Ara Tapu) Perched on a wooden sea-view platform just off the main road out of Avarua, this is the top choice with Avarua's trendy young things – it can get 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.

Staircase Restaurant & Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22254; Ara Tapu) Upstairs behind the Topshape Health & Fitness Centre building, the Staircase is always popular. The bar's decked out with atmospheric island décor and has regular live bands and DJs, as well as a weekly island night.

Trader Jack's (Map pp442-3; ☎ 26464) An old favourite with Rarotonga's upmarket crowd – you'll find tourists and yachties rubbing shoulders with politicians and businessmen in the downstairs bar. Keep an eye out for 'Gentleman Jack' himself – he can often be seen propping up the bar.

RSA Bar (Map pp438-9; ☎ 20590) Opposite the airport, 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).

Hideaway Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22224; Cook's Corner Arcade) As its name suggests, the Hideaway is tucked away and is 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 pp442-3; ☎ 29879; Ara Tapu) Another popular spot for the older crowd, with a large, lively bar sheltered under a thatched roof and a back garden that plays host to regular live bands.

TJ's Nightclub (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24722; Ara Tapu; admission Fri & Sat NZ\$2) Avarua's main club mainly caters for the 18 to 25 crowd, with plenty of ear-busting tunes, UV lights and hot-and-sweaty dancing.

Banana Court Bar (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23397) Once the best-known drinking hole in the Cook Islands, the cavernous Banana Court is far from the den of iniquity it once was, but it's still a decent place to find a drink. There are late-night discos on Friday and Saturday. It's also popular with the island's gay crowd.

Cinemas

Empire Cinema (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23189; Ara Tapu; adult/child NZ\$8/4) This cinema shows nightly flicks on a couple of decent-sized screens, and there are usually half-price tickets on Thursday.

SHOPPING

Arts & Crafts

If you're in search of traditional island handicrafts, there are plenty of shops around Avarua selling local basketwork, shell jewellery, necklaces, carvings and musical instruments. Many islands have their own speciality handicrafts, including *rito* (coconut-fibre) fans and hats from the Northern Group, and *pupu ei* necklaces from Mangaia. Beware of cheap imports from China, Asia and other Pacific islands – ask if you're in any doubt about an item's provenance.

Mike Tavioni (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24003; Ara Metua, Aitupa) You can visit the workshop of Rarotonga's most renowned sculptor and

carver, on the back road near Avarua. See his stone carvings at the Punanga Nui Market and the National Culture Centre.

Island Craft (☎ 22009; Ara Māire Nui) This is the best-stocked souvenir shop in Avarua, though some of its stuff is pretty tacky.

Punanga Nui Market, the **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu, Avarua) and **Bergman & Sons Crafts Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21901; Banana Court) have the best selections of local craftwork.

The Cook Islands has a thriving visual arts scene – check out the **Arasena Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 23476; Banana Court) and the **Kenwall Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 25526; Ara Māire Nui), both in Avarua, or the Art Studio over in 'Arorangi.

Black Pearl Jewellery

The Cook Islands are important producers of black pearls, which are much rarer than their cream-coloured cousins. A single pearl could cost you anything from NZ\$5 to well over NZ\$1000. The largest retailers include **Bergman & Sons Pearl Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21902; Tutakimoo Rd); **Beachcomber Gallery** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 21939; Ara Tapu); **Goldmine** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 24823), on Avarua's main road; and **Moana Gems** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 22312) in the CITC Shopping Centre.

Pareu & Other Clothing

The quintessential item of clothing on Rarotonga is the *pareu* (sarong). Printed *pareu* cost around NZ\$10 to NZ\$15; hand-made ones are around NZ\$25 to NZ\$35. Printed T-shirts (from NZ\$10 to NZ\$25) and retina-threatening floral shirts (from NZ\$20 to NZ\$95) are sold in several shops around Avarua – check out **Vonnia's Store** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20927; Ara Māire Nui), **Tuki's Pareu** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 25537; Ara Māire Nui) and **Mareko** (Map pp442-3; ☎ 20548; Ara Māire Nui).

Perfumes, Soaps & Coconut Oil

Perfumes of Rarotonga (Map pp438-9; ☎ 26238) On the main road in Matavera, this place makes its own perfumes, soaps, liqueurs and scented oils. Handmade coconut soap costs around NZ\$3.50; perfume and cologne starts at NZ\$14 a bottle. There's another outlet in the Cooks Corner Arcade in Avarua, or you can buy the products at the Perfume Factory (Map pp442-3) on Ara Metua.

Stamps & Coins

Philatelic Bureau (Map pp442-3; ☎ 29336) Sells Cook Islands coins and bank notes, plus sets of Cook Islands stamps (highly prized by philatelists). The unique \$3 Cook Islands note is available in two designs.

AITUTAKI

pop 1800 / area 18.3 sq km

Curling gracefully around one of the most breathtakingly beautiful lagoons in the South Pacific, hook-shaped Aitutaki is the second-most visited island in the Cooks. It's the archetypal image of a desert-island getaway, with a palm-covered mainland and a sprinkling of deserted islets, and a powder-blue lagoon that's just crying out to be explored. It's a world away from Rarotonga, which will seem like a bustling metropolis once you've spent a few days on Aitutaki. It doesn't take long before you're lulled into the laid-back pace of life on the island, and after a while even snorkelling and lazing around on the sand will start to feel like dynamic activity.

HISTORY

Legends tell of the first Polynesian settlers, led by Ru from 'Avaiki, arriving at Aitutaki by canoe. Ru arrived with his wives and family at the Akitua *motu* (now the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort). Aitutaki's original name was Ararau 'Enea O Ru Ki Te Moana (Ru in Search of Land over Sea) – the present name, *a'i tutaki*, means 'to keep the fire going'.

Aitutaki's European discoverer was Captain William Bligh, who arrived on the *Bounty* on 11 April 1789 (17 days before the famous mutiny). In 1821 John Williams left Papeiha and Vahapata here to convert the islanders to Christianity. The 1850s saw Aitutaki become a favourite port of call for whaling ships scouring the Pacific. During WWII a contingent of American soldiers arrived to build two long runways, with predictable results on the island's birthrate.

ORIENTATION

You can undertake a tour of Aitutaki in a few hours. The island is shaped like a curved fishhook; at the point you'll find

O'tu Beach and the private Aitutaki Lagoon Resort; slightly to the north there's the airstrip and international airport. On the west side of the island you'll find most of the hotels and the main town of Arutanga. On the east coast are the small villages of Tautu, Vaipae and Vaipeka. The numerous *motu* around the edge of Aitutaki's lagoon are uninhabited.

INFORMATION

Ask at your hotel if you should boil the water before drinking it. Many places get their drinking water from separate rain tanks.

There aren't any dogs on Aitutaki (the island's canine population was blamed for a leprosy outbreak) but there are plenty of roosters – bring earplugs if you're planning on sleeping in.

The main police office is behind the Orongo Centre near the wharf in Arutanga.

ANZ Bank agent (☎ 31418; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Located inside Mango Trading next to Mae-Jo's Takeaway. There's an ATM outside.

Hospital (☎ 31002; ☎ 24hr) On the hill behind Arutanga.

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 31470; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) In the Administration Centre in Arutanga.

SpiderCo Internet Lounge (☎ 31780; lounge@aitutaki.net.ck; per min NZ\$0.50) The only Internet lounge on Aitutaki.

Visitor information centre (☎ 31767; retire-tourism@aitutaki.net.ck; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri)

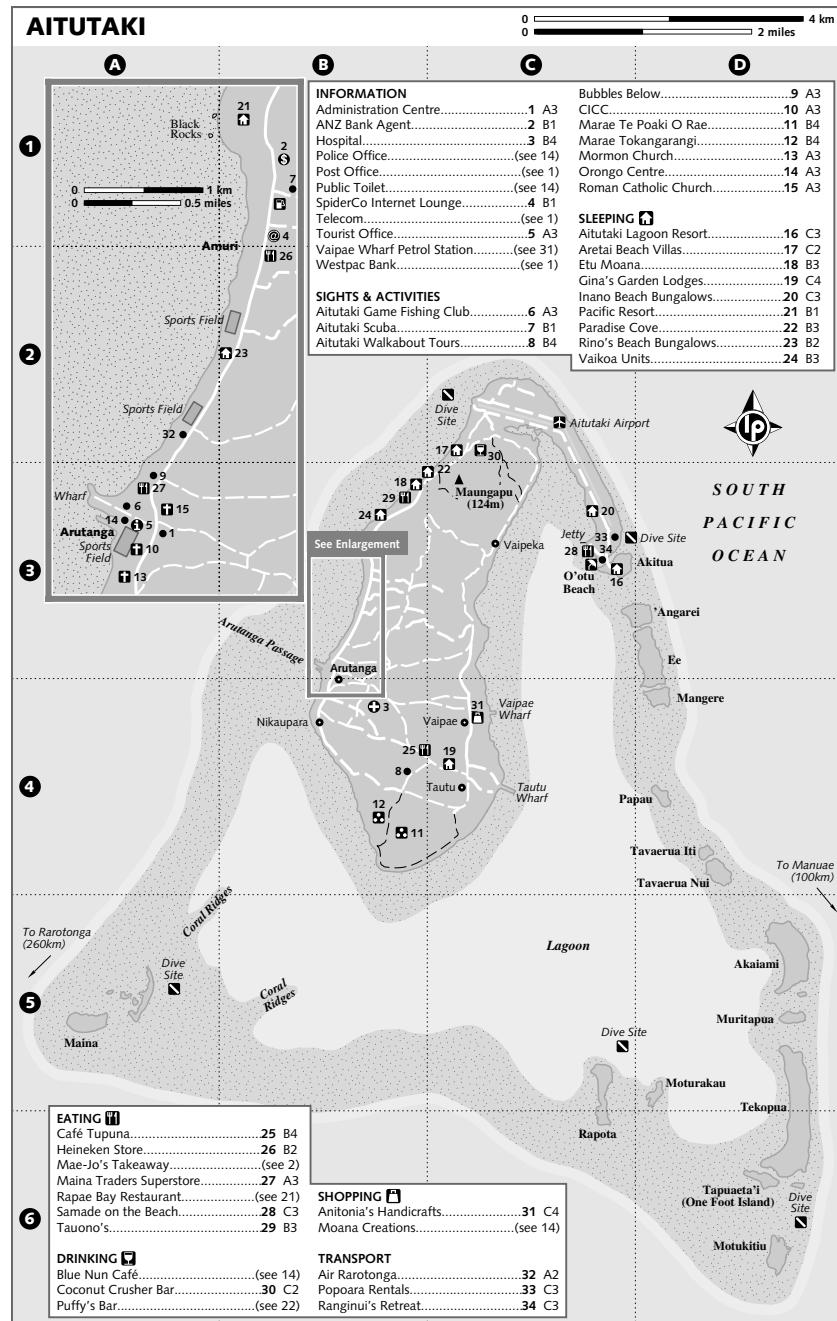
Westpac (☎ 31714; ☎ 9.30am-3pm Mon-Thu) In the Administration Centre in Arutanga.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (www.airraro.com; Arutanga ☎ 31888; Rarotonga ☎ 22888) operates several flights to Aitutaki from Rarotonga from Monday to Saturday, as well as one flight on Sunday. Regular fares are from NZ\$170 each way; cheaper fares are available if you book early. There are also direct flights from Aitutaki to 'Atiu every Tuesday, which can be included as part of the Island Hopper Pass (Rarotonga-Aitutaki-'Atiu-Rarotonga, from NZ\$400).

Aitutaki Day Tours run by Air Rarotonga operate from Monday to Saturday, leaving Rarotonga at 8am and returning at 5.30pm. The cost is from NZ\$400 per person, including flights and a lagoon cruise.



Transport ships en route to the Northern Group occasionally stop at Aitutaki. See p476 for details of the main shipping operators.

Getting Around

Island Tours (☎ 31379) offers a minibus transfer service that costs NZ\$10 to and from the airport. Make arrangements with Willy at the airport. The larger resorts provide transfers for their guests.

Various places rent bicycles (NZ\$5 per day), mopeds (NZ\$25), cars and jeeps (NZ\$70 to NZ\$100). Try **Popoara Rentals** (☎ 31739; www.popoara.com; O'otu Beach), **Ranginui's Retreat** (☎ 31657; O'otu Beach) or, for the best range, **Rino's Beach Bungalows & Rentals** (☎ 31197; Arutanga).

AROUND THE ISLAND

Arutanga

Even by Cook Islands standards, Aitutaki's only town is astonishingly quiet. Sleepy isn't really the word – even on weekdays, when the few shops in town are open, you'll have a tough time spotting any signs of life. The island's main harbour is by the Orongo Centre in the heart of town, and only springs into action when a cargo boat from Rarotonga is due to arrive. The weather-beaten **CIC** church near the Administration Centre was built in 1828 making it the oldest in the Cooks. Notable features include some lovely stained-glass windows, some fine carved wood panelling and an old anchor that's precariously suspended from the ceiling.

Marae

Aitutaki's *marae* are notable for their large stones. Orongo *marae* used to sit where the Blue Nun Café is today, in Arutanga. The main road goes through a large *marae*, and on the inland road between Nikaupara and Tautu there are some of the most magnificent *marae* on the island – including Tokangarangi and Te Poaki O Rae – but you'll find that most of them have been reclaimed by the jungle.

Maungapu

The 30-minute hike to the top of Maungapu (124m), Aitutaki's highest peak, is worth the effort for great views over the entire atoll and the sapphire-blue lagoon. The

track starts off pretty gently opposite the bungalows of Paradise Cove, but gets more challenging towards the summit.

Aitutaki Lagoon

Packed with underwater life and ringed by 15 palm-covered *motu*, Aitutaki's stunning lagoon is one of the treasures of the South Pacific. **Maina** (Little Girl) offers some of the best snorkelling spots and is home to the red-tailed tropicbird, once prized for its crimson feathers; the wreck of the *Alexander*, a cargo freighter wrecked in the 1930s, is nearby. **Akaia** is where the old TEAL flying boats landed to refuel on the trans-Pacific 'Coral Route' between Fiji, Samoa and Tahiti. **Tapuaeta'i** (One Foot Island) is the best-known *motu*, fringed by white beaches and divided from its neighbour, Tekopua, by a deepwater channel that's teeming with tropical fish.

ACTIVITIES

Swimming & Snorkelling

The best swimming, snorkelling and beaches are around the *motu*, especially near Maina and Akitua (both accessible by boat; see opposite). Opposite Mae-Jo's Takeaway, south of Black Rocks, you can walk all the way to the outer reef on a coral causeway that starts 50m from the shore. The nicest places to swim on the main island are O'otu Beach and the wharfs at Vaipae and Tautu; the rest of the island's east coast is mainly mud and mangrove swamp, and not much fun for swimming.

Diving

Unsurprisingly the scuba diving is fantastic in Aitutaki. The visibility is great, and features include drop-offs, multilevels, wall dives and cave systems; the wreck of the *Alexander* is also a popular diving spot.

There are two professional diving operators on the island. Both run morning and afternoon dives; single-dive trips cost around NZ\$90 to NZ\$100 including gear, with discounts for multiple dives.

Aitutaki Scuba (☎ 31103; scuba@aitutaki.net.ck) is the longest-running outfit and is affiliated with PADI and NAUI.

Bubbles Below (☎ 31537; www.diveaitutaki.com) is a newer operator that has a great reputation with visiting divers, mainly thanks to the entertaining manager Onu (Turtle) Hewett.

TOURS

Most of the tour operators on Aitutaki don't have offices. If you want to arrange a cruise, call the operators or ask the people you're staying with to arrange it. The cruise operator will come and pick you up directly from your hotel.

Fishing

The best place to find out about fishing is the **Aitutaki Game Fishing Club** (☎ 31379), by the wharf in Arutanga. Prices for fishing trips range from around NZ\$80 to NZ\$150 – if you're heading beyond the reef, make sure your boat has lifejackets and a first-aid kit.

Aitutaki Sea Charter (☎ 31281)

Baxter's Fishing Charters (☎ 31025; baxter@aitutaki.net.ck)

Vaikore Bone Fishing Charters (☎ 31292)

Lagoon Cruises

Don't miss the chance to take a lagoon cruise. There are several operators that cruise around the *motu* and snorkelling spots, though some cruises visit more islands than others. All operators provide snorkelling gear, a barbecue fish lunch and a stop at Tapuaeta'i (One Foot Island). Remember to take your passport to get it stamped at the One Foot 'post office'.

Aitutaki Adventures (☎ 31171) Lagoon cruises (around NZ\$65) run Sunday to Friday and include snorkelling, fish-feeding and a barbecue lunch on Tapuaeta'i.

Aitutaki Glass Bottom Boat (☎ 31790; story@aitutaki.net.ck) Aitutaki's only glass-bottomed boat chugs around the lagoon and the outside reef.

Bishop's Lagoon Cruises (☎ 31009; bishopcruz@aitutaki.net.ck) Tours visit Maina, Moturakau and

Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$65); there's also a tour to Akaia and Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$35), as well as sunset, honeymoon cruises and *motu* drop-offs.

Kia-Orana Cruises (☎ 31442; kruise@aitutaki.net.ck) The main tour visits Maiana, Moturakau, Honeymoon Island and Tapuaeta'i (NZ\$65). Tours run Sunday to Friday.

Paradise Islands Lagoon Tours (☎ 31248; titaitonga@aitutaki.net.ck; cruises NZ\$65) Cruises are on a Polynesian-style catamaran, the *Titi Ai Tonga* (Wind from the South), which has a roof and onboard bar.

Teking (☎ 31582; teking@aitutaki.net.ck) Offers a main 'Four Island' cruise to Akaia, Tapuaeta'i, Honeymoon Island and Maiana (NZ\$65).

Other Tours

Aitutaki Walkabout Tours (☎ 31757; www.aitutaki-walkabout.com) offers a walkabout tour (adult/child NZ\$40/10) concentrating on the island's flora and fauna, and a 'discovery safari' (adult/child NZ\$55/10) that visits the island's main historical sites in a Jeep. Both tours run twice daily Sunday to Friday. During crab season, there's a night-time crab hunt (adult/child NZ\$45/10).

Chloe & Nane's Tropicool Tour (☎ 31248) offers village and *marae* tours in a small minibus (NZ\$30) from Monday to Saturday, as well as a popular sunset tour to see Aitutaki's rare blue lorikeet.

SLEEPING

Budget

Paradise Cove (☎ 31218; www.paradisecove.co.ck; house s/d NZ\$35/45, beach hut s/d NZ\$45/60, bungalows NZ\$160) They're on a glorious beach shaded by coconut palms, but the thatched huts and pole-houses of the Paradise Cove don't quite live up to their picture-perfect image. Most of the budget rooms are actually inside the run-down one-storey house; outside, there are several bargain-basement beach huts (complete with bed, mosquito net, bar-fridge and not much else). The pricier pole-houses have a small bedroom and tiny kitchen leading onto a beachfront veranda.

Vaikoa Units (☎ /fax 31145; s/d/tr NZ\$55/75/85, beachfront bungalows NZ\$110-130) This motel has been a time-honoured option for budget travellers on Aitutaki for years, and some of the self-contained units are showing their age. The older tin-roofed motel units are a little murky, but they're cheap and fairly clean. The newly finished beachfront bungalows are much lighter and roomier, and worth the extra cost.

TOP FIVE ISLAND NIGHTS

A highly subjective top five of the best places to shake your hips and knock your knees in the Cook Islands.

- Right on the Beach Bar & Restaurant (Rarotonga, p451)
- Rarotongan Beach Resort (Rarotonga, p449)
- Staircase (Rarotonga, p452)
- Blue Nun Café (Aitutaki, p459)
- Atiu Villas ('Atiu, p462)

Midrange

Aretai Beach Villas (☎ 31645; www.aretaibeachvillas.com; bungalows NZ\$250) Halfway between Arutanga and the airport, these beautiful sea-view bungalows are a home away from home, with lovingly finished interiors, wooden floors and tastefully chosen furniture. There are two bedrooms in every bungalow and the kitchens are probably better-equipped than the one you've got back home.

Inano Beach Bungalows (☎ 31758; www.inano.beach.com; lagoon-view/beachfront bungalows NZ\$130/160) Out towards the airport, these secluded new lodges have been constructed using local materials wherever possible. The ironwood balconies, mahogany tabletops and fibre-plait walls have a hand-finished, authentic feel, though they might be too rustic for some. You'll need wheels.

Rino's Beach Bungalows (☎ 31197; rinos@aitutaki.net; d NZ\$120, beachfront bungalows NZ\$185-290) The only out-and-out motel accommodation on Aitutaki, with a selection of modern apartments near the beach and several rooms in the twin-storey buildings nearer the road. There's not much island character to them but the units are decent value and most have a sea view.

Top End

Etu Moana (☎ 31458; www.etumoana.com; villas NZ\$400; 🍷) These extravagant thatch-roofed villas have been luxuriously finished, from the

gleaming Tasmanian oak floors, lofty roofs and vast beds to the ultra-romantic outdoor showers and teak-wood sun decks. Hand-carved ornaments decorate each villa, and there's a tear-drop pool complete with rock garden, sun-shaded tables and a deluxe honesty bar.

Aitutaki Lagoon Resort (☎ 31201; www.aitutakilagoonresort.com; garden/beachfront/over-water bungalows NZ\$500/650/1330, beachfront st NZ\$900; 🍷 🍷 🍷) If you're looking to do Aitutaki in style, then this glorious resort is hard to beat. Perched on its own private island, reached by ferryboat, the resort offers a range of delightful bungalows, from thatched garden villas right through to lavish suites on wooden poles above the lagoon.

Pacific Resort (☎ 31720; www.pacificresort.com; beachfront bungalows/st/villas NZ\$760/1020/1330; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Another splendid resort with sky-high rates, this hotel pulls out all the luxury stops to cater for its exacting clientele. The minute you walk through the sumptuous foyer, complete with an Oriental lily pond and a reception desk the size of several family cars, you know you're in for something special. Private sun decks, cavernous bedrooms and magnificent ocean-view sitting rooms are just the start.

EATING

Café Tupuna (☎ 31678; Tautu; mains NZ\$26-30; 🍷 dinner) The nearest thing to a gourmet restaurant on Aitutaki, in a rural setting high up behind Arutanga. Freshly caught fish and island flavours form the backbone of the menu, and the garden location is one of the most atmospheric places to eat on the island.

Samade on the Beach (☎ 31526; O'otu Beach; lunch NZ\$7-10, dinner NZ\$13-20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Samade is an ideal spot for a light lunch by the lagoon; its sand-floored restaurant is huddled under a thatched canopy opposite the beach. The food's not fantastically exciting – fish, salads and steaks are the mainstays – but there are regular island nights and there's also a great Sunday barbecue.

Rapae Bay Restaurant (☎ 31720; lunch from NZ\$10, mains NZ\$25-45; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Top dining at the Pacific Resort, serving Pacific fusion cuisine and huge seafood platters in a tastefully lit patio setting.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Tauono's (☎ 31562; cakes NZ\$3-6, dinner NZ\$25-40; 🍷 afternoon tea 3-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, dinner by reservation) This tiny garden café is run by Sonja, an Austrian chef, and her Aitutakian husband, Tauono. Renowned for its coconut cake and afternoon teas, Tauono's also offers sumptuous home-cooked cuisine served alfresco – meals are cooked to taste, and most of the organic produce is sourced from the higgledy-piggledy on-site garden. Stop by during the day to pick up a homemade cake or stock up with fresh fruit and veg from Sonja's shop (open 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday) – if you're really lucky, you might even see some of Tauono's traditional woodcarvings.

Mae-Jo's Takeaway (☎ 31820; mains NZ\$12-32; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) This Chinese-themed takeaway joint on the main road into Arutanga does the standard range of chow mein and fried-rice dishes.

Market (Orongo Centre; 🍷 7am-3pm Mon-Sat) Aitutaki's market is pretty quiet during the day, but get there early and you can usually pick up fresh fish and local vegetables.

Maina Traders Superstore (Arutanga) and the **Heineken Store** (Amuri) are the main places to pick up self-catering supplies, though you'll find the prices are a little higher than on Rarotonga.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The island nights on Aitutaki are arguably even better than the ones on Rarotonga. You'll pay NZ\$25 to NZ\$50 for the per-

formance and buffet, but you can usually watch the show for free if you buy a few drinks.

Coconut Crusher Bar (☎ 31283; 🍷 nightly Mon-Sat) This lively local bar looks like it could blow down in a gentle breeze, but despite the ramshackle design, it's the island's main nightspot. Shake your booty at the regular island nights or roll up for the weekend DJs.

Samade (☎ 31526; O'otu Beach) Another popular spot for drinking, dinner and island nights, with a great view of the lagoon thrown in for free. The only drawback is the out-of-the-way location; luckily, transfers can be arranged.

Blue Nun Café (☎ 31604; Orongo Centre; 🍷 dinner & drinks Tue-Sun) This cavernous café-bar is inside the island's old banana-packing plant, with a vast concrete dance floor where weekend discos and island nights kick into action. There's a large bar and breezy dining area where you can pick up snacks, sandwiches and burgers.

Puffy's Bar (☎ 31317; 🍷 dinner & drinks Mon-Sat) A tiny little bar popular with locals and backpackers from nearby Paradise Cove. Cheap booze and basic meals (fish and chips, burgers) are available; there's also a weekly island night.

SHOPPING

Moana Creations (☎ 31718; 🍷 8.30am-3pm Mon-Sat) Island crafts and souvenirs are sold in the Orongo Centre at this shop.

Anitonia's Handicrafts (☎ 31207; Vaipae) Near Vaipae Wharf, Anitonia's is worth a look, but the opening hours are somewhat erratic.

Ask at your hotel if there are any local craftsmen with work to sell.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Gina's Garden Lodges (☎ 31058; www.ginasaitutaki.com; s/d/tr NZ\$75/120/150; 🍷) These four lodges in Tautu, peacefully set around a secluded garden awash with fruit trees and flowers, represent perhaps the best value anywhere on Aitutaki. Run by one of Aitutaki's three *ariki* (high chiefs), Manarangi Tutai Ariki, the four lodges are all fully self-contained, with spacious, high-ceilinged bedrooms and large verandas overlooking the gardens and the decked swimming pool; there's also a small loft sleeping area that's tailor-made for kids. The old-fashioned décor could do with a little freshening up, but let's be honest – how often do you get the chance to stay with a queen?

MANUAE

The tiny, unpopulated islets of **Manuae** (population zero, area 6.8 sq km) and **Te Au O Tu**, jointly known as Manuae, lie 101km from Aitutaki Atoll and belong to the people of Aitutaki. These islets are the only parts of a huge volcanic cone to break the ocean's surface. The cone measures 56km from east to west, 24km north to south. The other high point on the rim of this vast cone is the **Astronomer Bank**, 13km west of Manuae, which comes to within 300m of the ocean's surface.

Copra-cutting parties visit Manuae from Aitutaki occasionally, as they have done for a century or more. In 1823 the missionary John Williams visited the island and found about 60 inhabitants. There were only a dozen or so in the late 1820s, and missionaries took them to Aitutaki. Later, various Europeans made temporary homes on Manuae. The best known was William Marsters, who in 1863 relocated to Palmerston with his three wives.

PALMERSTON

pop 52 / area 2 sq km

All the residents of the tiny island of Palmerston, halfway between the Southern and Northern Groups, owe their existence to just one man – the prolific (and priapic) William Marsters, an English trader who first set foot on the island in 1863. Over the next 30 years Marsters set about creating his own island dynasty, ably assisted by his three Maori wives – and today, the three main families on Palmerston can all trace their ancestry back to the original Mr Marsters. In fact, you'll find Marsterses scattered throughout the Cooks and the rest of Australasia – it's thought the total number of William's descendants is now well into triple figures.

There's no organised accommodation on Palmerston, but the traditional spirit of Cook Islands hospitality is alive and well – it's customary that the first family to greet a visitor provides them with food and lodging for the rest of their stay. If you're planning on travelling to Palmerston, contact the island secretary **Tere Marsters** (☎ 37684, 54660; palmerstonisland@hotmail.com). The only way to reach the island is by inter-island freighter or private yacht (see p476).

'ATI U

The rocky, reef-fringed island of 'Atiu was once the most feared island in the region, renowned for its ferocious warriors and their ruthlessness in battle. Ironically, 'Atiu is now better known for altogether gentler pursuits – it's the eco-capital of the Cooks, a haven for naturalists and bird-lovers, as well as adventurous travellers in search of an island with a more traditional edge. The five main villages (Areora, Tengtangi, Mapumai, Te'enui and Ngatiarua) are perched on the island's central plateau, which is surrounded by a band of fertile swampland and lush taro plantations. Further towards the coast is 'Atiu's most dramatic natural feature, the *makatea*, a ring of upthrust rock that once formed the island's exterior reef. Covered with rich forest and honeycombed with caves, the *makatea* makes a fantastic spot for hiking and nature-watching, especially

at Anatakitaki Cave, the only known home of the *kopeka*.

HISTORY

Atiu's traditional name is 'Enua Manu ('Land of Birds' or 'Land of Insects'). Along with its neighbouring islands of Ma'u'ke and Mitiaro, 'Atiu makes up the sub-group of Nga Pu Toru (Three Roots). Ma'u'ke and Mitiaro often bore the brunt of 'Atiu's territorial ambitions, and for much of their history the smaller islands were ruled by 'Atiuan *ariki*. The European discovery of 'Atiu is credited to James Cook on 3 April 1777. Rongomatane, the leading 'Atiuan chief, was converted to Christianity after the missionaries passed his challenge of eating sugar cane from the sacred grove; he subsequently ordered all the idols on the island to be burnt. The arrival of the missionaries Williams and Papeiha is still celebrated here on Gospel Day on 19 July.

INFORMATION

'Atiu Tourism Society (☎ 33031; www.atiutourism.com)

ADC Shop (☎ 33028; Areora) Provides cash advances on credit cards.

Centre Store (☎ 33773; Te'enui) Travellers cheques (NZ dollars only) can be cashed here.

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 33680; fax 33683; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) In the same building, north of Mapumai village.

www.atiu.info Excellent information resource on 'Atiu.

TRANSPORT

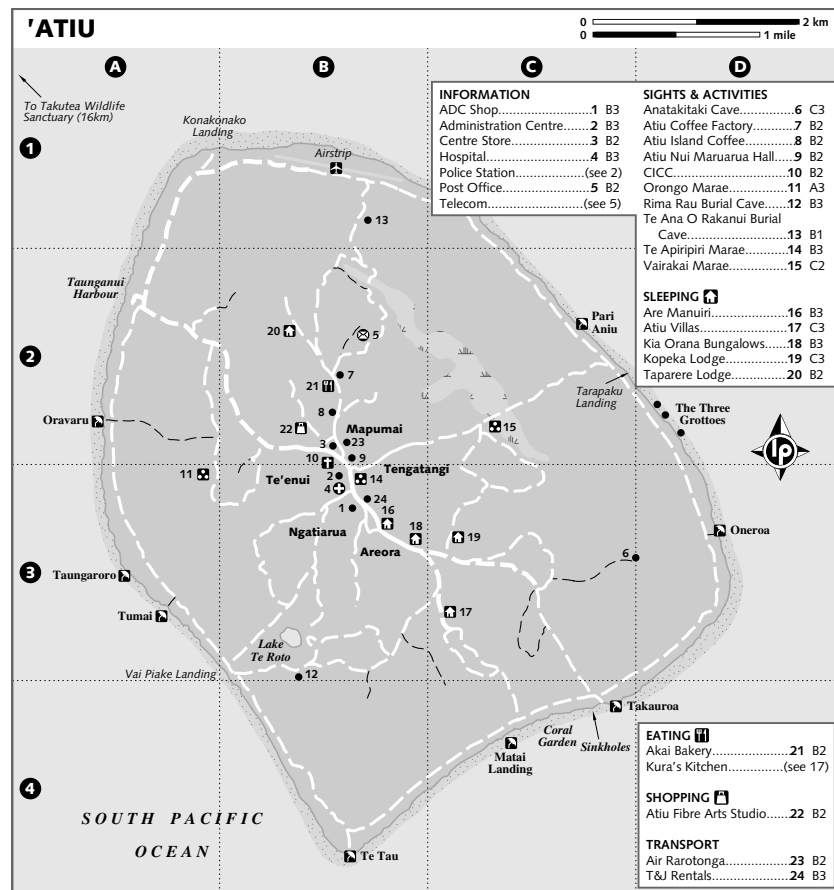
Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (☎ 33888; www.airraro.com) flies between Rarotonga and 'Atiu Monday to Saturday. Return fares cost from NZ\$270. The Rarotonga-Aitutaki-'Atiu Island Hopper Pass (from NZ\$400) allows you to add on a flight to 'Atiu direct from Aitutaki (any day as long as it's Tuesday). See p476 for information on inter-island shipping services.

Getting Around

You'll need transport to get around 'Atiu. All the accommodation places can provide scooters (NZ\$25 per day), or try **T & J Rentals** (☎ 33271; Areora), which also has bicycles.

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



SIGHTS

Caves

'Atiu is famous for its limestone caves, hidden away deep in the bush-covered *makatea*. Take a torch (flashlight) and wear sturdy walking shoes or old sneakers – the coral is razor-sharp, so take care. You'll need a guide to visit the main caves, which are on private land and difficult to find (see p462). Many caves were used for burials – don't move or take any of the bones unless you fancy taking home a curse...

'Atiu's most spectacular cave is **Anataki-taki**, a haunting, multichambered cave surrounded by banyan roots and thick jungle. It's also home to the *kopeka*, a rare bird also known as the 'Atiuan swiftlet – listen out

for its distinctive echo-locating clicks when you're inside the cave.

Te Ana O Rakanui and **Rima Rau** are both burial caves; the latter is reached by a vertical pothole. Both are packed with musty old skulls and skeletal remains – and they're a tight squeeze inside, so steer clear if you're even faintly claustrophobic.

Lake Te Roto is noted for its *itiki* (eels), a popular island delicacy. On the western side of the lake, a cave leads right through the *makatea* to the sea.

Beaches

'Atiu's reef is close to shore – the surrounding lagoon is rarely more than 50m wide and the water is generally quite shallow.

The best swimming spot is **Taunganui Harbour**, where the water is clear and deep. **Oravaru Beach** on the west coast is where Captain Cook's party made its historic landing. Further south are two of the most popular beaches on the island for swimming and sunbathing – **Taungaroro** and **Tumai**.

Near **Takauora Beach** are three lovely sinkholes which can only be visited at low tide and when the sea is calm. At low tide the lagoon from Takauora beach to Matai Landing drains out through the sinkholes and fish become trapped in a fascinating natural aquarium known as the **Coral Garden**.

Coffee Plantations

For more than a century, since the plant was introduced by early-19th-century traders, coffee has been one of 'Atiu's main exports. There are two home-grown brands available on the island. Juergen Manske-Eimke's **Atiu Coffee** (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck/coffee) is machine-roasted in the coffee factory in Mapumai village. Mata Arai's **Atiu Island Coffee** (☎ 33088) is hand-picked, hand-dried and hand-roasted, using coconut cream to give the coffee its flavour. Both growers offer tours (NZ\$10) which include plenty of opportunities to taste the local brew.

Marae

There are several intriguing *marae* on 'Atiu. **Marae Orongo**, near Oravaru Beach, was once the most sacred *marae* on the island, and it's still a powerfully atmospheric place – many locals are still reluctant to venture anywhere near it. You'll need a guide as it's on private land.

Marae Vairakai, along a walking track north of Kopeka Lodge, is surrounded by 47 large limestone slabs, six of which have curious projections cut into their top edges.

TOURS

Atiu Tours (☎ 33041; www.atiutours.co.ck) is run by an Englishman, Marshall Humphreys, who offers a 3½-hour circle-island tour (NZ\$40) visiting *marae*, historical spots, beaches and other points of interest. There's also an excellent 2½-hour tour to Anatakikaki (NZ\$25) and Rima Rau burial cave (\$15).

George Mateariki (☎ 33047), 'Atiu's resident birdman, has become a local celebrity thanks to his highly entertaining eco-tour (\$40). George oversaw the release of the

TOP FIVE CAVES IN THE COOK ISLANDS

- Anatakikaki ('Atiu, p461)
- Rima Rau ('Atiu, p461)
- Motuanga (Ma'uke, p464)
- Vai Nauri (Mitiaro, p466)
- Te Rua Rere (Mangaia, p469)

endangered *kakerori* here from Rarotonga, and with luck you'll meet his favourite pair of birds (named George and Mildred after the 1970s UK sitcom).

Paiere Mokoroa (☎ 33034) at Taparere Lodge and **Man Unuia** (☎ 33283) of Kopeka Lodge both offer historical island tours, based on personal research, for NZ\$26 and NZ\$25 respectively.

Aue Rakanui (☎ 33256) leads you to his family's burial cave, Te Ana O Rakanui, but you'll need your own transport.

SLEEPING

Atiu Villas (☎ 33777; www.atiu.info/atiuvillas; standard bungalow s/d/tr NZ\$100/110/120, f bungalow s/d/tr NZ\$110/120/125; ☎) 'Atiu's original holiday villas, hand-built from local materials 25 years ago by Roger Malcolm (Doctor of Physics and ex-island mayor) and his 'Atiuan wife Kura, are still going strong. The six delightful villas are arranged around a shady garden and all have lovely outside decks where you can sit back and drink in the views.

Kopeka Lodge (☎ 33283; www.kopekalodge-atiu.com; s/d NZ\$85/125) Three rustic plywood chalets in rural grounds southeast of Areora village, with one single and two double units complete with self-contained kitchen. The stained-wood and pale-green colour scheme is simple, but the units are quite comfortable.

Kia Orana Bungalows (☎ 33013; boaza@kia_orana.co.ck; d NZ\$80) These six dinky wooden bungalows look like they've fallen off a gypsy caravan train. The chalets are minuscule inside, with a tiny kitchen and bedroom area, but the majestic view across the jungle-covered valley is something else.

Taparere Lodge (☎/fax 33034; s/d NZ\$65/80, extra person NZ\$20) These two airy, breeze-block-style units are decorated in Spartan style with bright, homemade bedspreads and whitewashed walls.

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

EATING

Kura's Kitchen (☎ 33777; Atiu Villas; dinner NZ\$25) The only place to eat out is at Atiu Villas, where Kura cooks evening meals; book before 3pm.

'Atiu has three grocery stores and the **Akai Bakery** (☎ 33207; Mapumai).

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Depending on how many guests are staying, the thatched pavilion-bar at Atiu Villas sometimes puts on a fantastically informal island night (NZ\$35 with food, or NZ\$10 for the show). Village events or discos are sometimes held in one of the church halls – ask around.

SHOPPING

Woodcarving is popular on the island and several carvers sell from their homes. 'Atiuan coffee makes a great souvenir.

TUMUNU

The *tumunu* (bush-beer drinking sessions) came into existence during the period when missionaries attempted to stamp out kava drinking in the Cooks, and men would retreat to the bush to drink home-brewed 'orange beer'. *Tumunu* are still held regularly on 'Atiu; the *tumunu* is the hollowed-out stump of a coconut palm traditionally used as a container for brewing the beer. All sessions retain some of the ancient ceremonies associated with drinking kava, but the container is likely to be plastic nowadays. Technically, bush-beer drinking sessions are still illegal.

Most locals and hotel owners can arrange an invitation to visit the local *tumunu*. Traditionally, it's for men only, but the rules relax somewhat for tourists, and any visitor, male or female, is welcome. Just be wary of over-imbibing – bush beer is pretty potent stuff.

Textiles

Atiu Fibre Arts Studio (☎ 33031; www.adc.co.ck/art; Te'enui; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 1am-1pm Sat) The studio specialises in *tivaevae* and traditional textile arts. The cost of a machine-sewn double- to queen-size *tivaevae* is NZ\$600 to NZ\$1100. A hand-sewn one, requiring countless hours of work, costs NZ\$1500 or more. There's an on-site gallery if you just want to have a look.

MA'UKE

pop 440 / area 18.4 sq km

Like its neighbouring islands, the lush island of Ma'uke is characterised by its *makatea* and thick coastal forest, although it's much flatter than 'Atiu and only slightly larger than Mitiaro. It's a sleepy and quietly charming island, circled by a rough coastal track and pockmarked with many underground caverns, including Motuanga, a network of caves that's said to stretch right out underneath the reef. Ma'uke is one of the region's main exporters of tropical flowers, which accounts for its reputation as the 'garden island' of the Cooks. It means your goodbye 'ei is bound to be particularly impressive.

INFORMATION

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

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

Post office & Telecom office (☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) There's a 24-hour Kiaorana cardphone (☎ 35685) outside and Internet access (per half-hour NZ\$10.50).

Wendy's Store (☎ 35102) ANZ agent, near the Divided Church in Areora; changes US dollars.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

Air Rarotonga (www.airraro.com; airport ☎ 35120 Kimianguata ☎ 35888) flies three times a week between Rarotonga and Ma'uke (from NZ\$290 return), and sometimes offers direct flights between Ma'uke and Mitiaro. See p476 for details of travelling by cargo ship.

Getting Around

Tiare Cottages and Ri's Retreat (see p465) can both organise scooter hire for NZ\$25 per day. Tiare also rents bicycles (NZ\$10 per day). Transfers to and from the airport cost NZ\$10.

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles

A	B
1 INFORMATION	
Administration	Vai Tango..... 14 A4
Centre..... 1 A4	Vai Tukume..... 15 A5
Hospital..... 2 A3	SLEEPING 
Police Station..... (see 1)	Ri's Retreat (Airport)..... 16 A3
Post Office..... 3 A4	Ri's Retreat
Telecom..... (see 3)	(Anaraura)..... 17 B5
Wendy's Store..... 4 A4	Tiare Cottages..... 18 A4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	EATING 
Divided Church..... 5 A4	Aretoa Store..... 19 A4
Kea's Grave..... 6 B5	Arki Store..... (see 19)
Koppukopi (Stomach	Kaki's Store..... 20 B4
Rock)..... 7 A4	Ma'u ke Market..... (see 1)
Marae Rangimauka..... 8 B4	Tua Trading..... 21 A4
Motounga Cave..... 9 B5	DRINKING 
Puaruka Mara..... (see 19)	Tura's Bar..... 22 A4
Vai Ma'u..... 10 A5	TRANSPORT
Vai Mororo..... 11 B4	Air Rarotonga..... 23 A3
Vai Moti..... 12 B5	
Vai Ou..... 13 B4	

Ma'uke's CICC was built by two villages, Areora and Ngatiarua, in 1882. When the outside was completed, there was disagreement between the villages about how the inside should be decorated, and the solution was to have a wall built down the middle and let each village have its own church within a church! The wall has since been removed, though the interior is decorated in markedly different styles. Each village has its own entrance, sits in its respective end and takes turns singing the hymns. The minister is expected to straddle the dividing line down the middle of the pulpit.

someone to guide you there the first time – local schoolkids often head there on weekends and afternoons after school. Other interesting caves in the north of the island, reached by old coral pathways across the *makatea*, include **Vai Ou**, **Vai Tukume**, **Vai Moraro**, **Vai Ma'u** and **Vai Moti**.

Motuanga (the ‘Cave of 100 Rooms’) is a complex of tunnels and caverns that starts in the southeastern corner of the island and is rumoured to extend all the way out to sea, though the rocks are slowly closing in and nowadays you can only get into eight of them. The cave was often used by the islanders as a hiding place from ‘Atiuan war parties.

Ma'uke's secluded coves and beaches are one of the island's main attractions, and they can all be easily reached from the 18km-long coast road. **One'unga**, on the east side, is one of the nicest beaches, and **Teoneroa** and **Tukume** on the island's southwestern side are also worth seeking out. Other beaches, such as **Anaraura** and **Teoneroa**, have picnic areas with thatched shelters (popular with the island's resident pigs). On the cliffs above Anaiti you'll find **Kea's Grave**, where the wife of Paikea (the Whale Rider) is said to have perished while waiting for her husband's return.

South of Tiare Cottages is **Kopupooki** (Stomach Rock) beach, with a beautiful fish-filled cave that becomes accessible at low tide.

Most of Ma'uake's *marae* are overgrown, but you can still find **Marae Rangimanuka**, the *marae* of Uke, with the help of a local guide. **Marae Puarakura** is a modern *marae*, still used for ceremonial functions, complete with stone seats for the *ariki*, *mataiapo* and *rangatira* (subchief).

Guided cave tours are offered by **Pi Tua** (☎ 35083), a sprightly 60-something-year-old who still leaps around the *makatea* like a man half his age. Also try **Tangata Ateriano** (☎ 35270), who's based at Tiare Cottages.

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

Tiare Cottages (☎ 35083; www.mauke.com; budget bungalows s/d NZ\$70/75, self-contained lodge s/d NZ\$75/85, beachfront house NZ\$135) These old tin-roofed budget lodges are pretty rudimentary, with a main sleeping area and primitive kitchen with a toilet and shower tacked on the end. The self-contained lodge is more comfortable, with a fully equipped kitchen and a spacious, cheerily furnished bedroom. Best of all is the fabulous sea-view house, perched on the cliff tops and reached by its own gravel pathway. It's an absolute steal for the price.

Ri's Retreat (☎ 35181; bungalows NZ\$85-115) A selection of brand-new bungalows in two locations beside the airport and near Anaraura Beach. The airport bungalows are sparkling-clean and brightly decorated, with large beds, modern bathrooms and sliding glass doors onto a small patio area, but the seaside bungalows, standing on stilts beside the beach, are the better choice.

Made from hand-cooked coconut oil and flavoured with several kinds of local herbs and natural essences (including gardenia and the secret ingredient, a medicinal herb called *pi*), this much-lauded local remedy is rumoured to cure many skin complaints and soothe insect bites, stings and sunburn – it's even supposed to cure warts.

Home-cooked dinners are available for guests at Tiare Cottages for NZ\$25 per meal – otherwise, you'll have to find what you can at Ma'u'e's scantily supplied grocery stores. The best-stocked shop is Tua Trading, near the Divided Church; the shelves at **Aretoa Store** (☎ 35111; Makatea) and **Ariki Store** (☎ 35103; Makatea) can be pretty bare. Kato's Store is the island's only bakery.

On Friday morning, starting at about 8.30am, you can buy fresh produce at the Ma'u'ke market, near the wharf.

Liquid refreshment is available at **Tura's Bar** (☎ 35023; 📅 Fri), Ma'uке's only bar, opposite Ma'uке College.

MITIARO

pop 236 / area 22.3 sq km

Even with the benefit of a bird's-eye view, you could almost be forgiven for missing tiny Mitiaro, one of the smallest islands of the Southern Group. It might not be classically beautiful in the traditional South Pacific sense – the beaches are small, and where the land's not covered with boggy swamp it's mainly black barren rock – but it's one of the most traditional and undeveloped islands in the Cooks and a fascinating place to while away a few days. Many handicrafts are practised on Mitiaro, including weaving, woodcarving and traditional fishing in outrigger canoes. The island is dotted with fascinating caves, including the natural underground pools of Vai Nauri and Vai Marere.

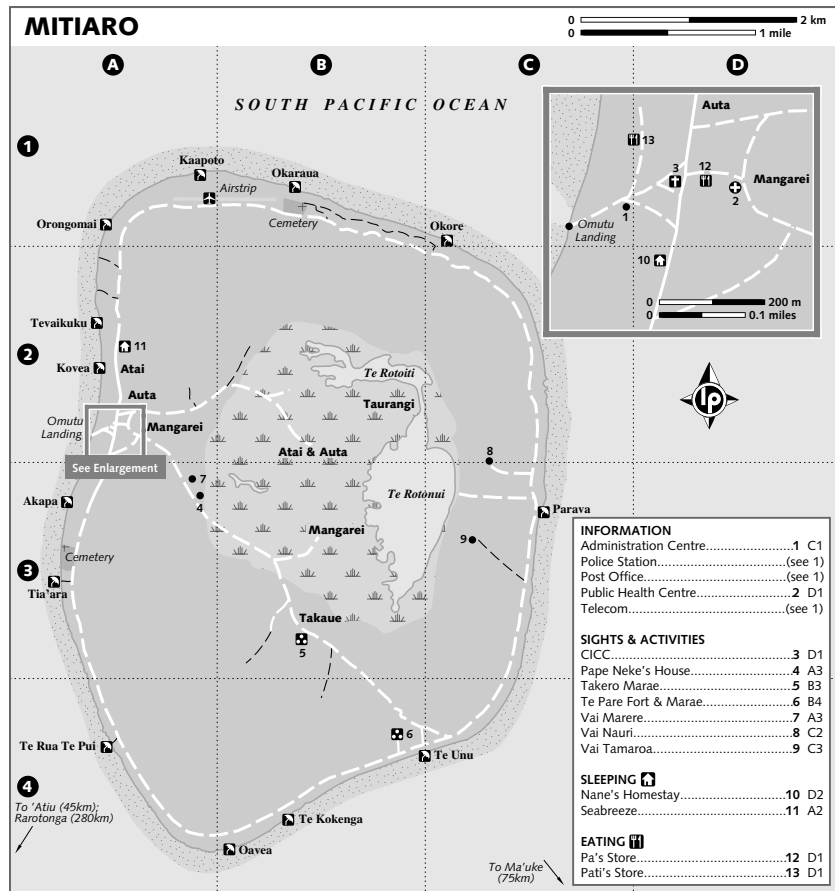
Electricity is available daily from 5am to midnight, and 24 hours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Bring plenty of cash with you – it's difficult to change money on Mitiano. Don't drink water from the tap, and watch out for the island's vicious mosquitoes.

The Administration Centre, located near the wharf, houses the **post office** (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), **Telecom** (☎ 36680; ☎ 8-10am & 1-3pm), **police station** (☎ 36150, 36122), **island secretary** (☎ 36108; fax 36157) and the mayor. **Julian Aupuni** (☎ 36180), Mitiamo's tourism officer, is also based at the Administration Centre.

SIGHTS

Caves

Like the other *makatea* islands, Ma'uке is riddled with caves, many filled with cool freshwater pools which are wonderful for a swim on a blazing hot day. The best cave for swimming is **Vai Tango**, a short walk from Ngatiarua village. You'll need



TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 36888; www.airraro.com) flies to Mitiaro three times per week on Monday Wednesday and Friday. The cost is from NZ\$300 return. There are occasional flights to Mitiaro from Ma'uke. For information on inter-island ships, see p476.

SIGHTS

Beaches, Caves & Pools

A 10-minute walk from Mangarei village on the Takauae road, **Vai Marere** is the only sulphur pool in the Cook Islands. It's only just visible from the main road, but as you duck into the cave it broadens out into a gloomy cavern covered with stalactites. Locals swear that the water has healing properties.

Vai Tamaroa is a 15-minute walk across sharp *makatea* from the coast road. You may need a local guide, as the trail is faint. Best of all is **Vai Nauri**, Mitiaro's 'natural swimming pool' – a deep, sparkling blue pool that makes an utterly unforgettable swimming spot. The local women hold gatherings known as *terevei* at both Vai Tamaroa and Vai Nauri, where they gather to swim and sing the bawdy songs of their ancestors.

Marae & Te Pare Fort

Most of Mitiaro's *marae* are considerably overgrown, although you can still see the stone seat of the *ariki* and several graves at **Marae Takero**, near the abandoned Takauae

village. Mitiaro's most impressive ancient remains are deep in the *makatea* at **Te Pare Fort**, built as a defence against 'Atiuan raids. An underground shelter was large enough for the people to congregate in during times of danger, while above was a lookout tower from which approaching canoes could be seen.

The only guide to Te Pare fort is Mitiaro's tourism officer, **Julian Aupuni** (☎ 36180), who has permission to visit the site from its owner Po Tetava Ariki. Papa Neke leads tours around the island's other historical sites; he can be contacted through **Seabreeze** (☎ 36153).

Plantations

In the 1800s the islanders moved their houses to the single seaside village, Mangarei, but they continued to use the fertile, peat-laden plantation areas in the island's centre. There are roads across the *makatea* to the plantations, although many people still make the long trip on foot.

Cook Islands Christian Church

The white-painted **CICC** is a fine sight, with its blue trim, stained-glass windows and parquet ceiling decorated with black-and-white stars, and the singing on Sunday is superb.

Cemetery

The cemetery on the island's northern side has a few modern-style tombs and many older graves marked by simple slabs of coral. The local custom is to leave possessions of the deceased at the headstone, along with some cutlery and crockery so that the spirit can eat from his own plate.

Lakes

Mitiaro is unique in the Cooks for its twin lakes, **Te Rotonui** (Big Lake) and **Te Rotoiti** (Small Lake). A rough track leads to the edge of Te Rotonui, where there's a boat landing and a pleasant picnic spot. Both lakes are stuffed with *itiki*, a local delicacy.

SLEEPING & EATING

Seabreeze (☎ 36153; r per person incl meals NZ\$75) The only real visitor accommodation on the island is run by a local family on the outskirts of Mangeri. There are a couple of simple rooms inside the main one-storey

house and a spacious self-contained unit out the back.

Nane's Homestay (☎ 36107; s/d NZ\$35/45) The only other place to stay on Mitiaro is with Nane Pokoati, a local *mataiapo* and a bubbly, friendly host. There are no private rooms, just beds in a communal sleeping area in Nane's large, modern house. Meals are included at extra cost.

Limited food supplies are sold at the small village food shops, Pa's Store and Pati's Store, and at Seabreeze.

MANGAIA

pop 780 / area 51.8 sq km

Mangaia is perhaps the most visually dramatic island in the Cooks, with a circlet of jet-black *makatea* concealing a huge sunken volcanic cone in the island's centre, now home to the island's taro fields and vegetable plantations.

Mangaia is the second-largest island in the Cooks, only slightly smaller than Rarotonga, and its people have acquired something of a reputation for haughtiness and superiority (they're sometimes referred to as the British of the Cook Islands). There are fabulous caves to explore and some fantastic viewpoints over the central valleys, especially from the island's highest point at Rangimotia.

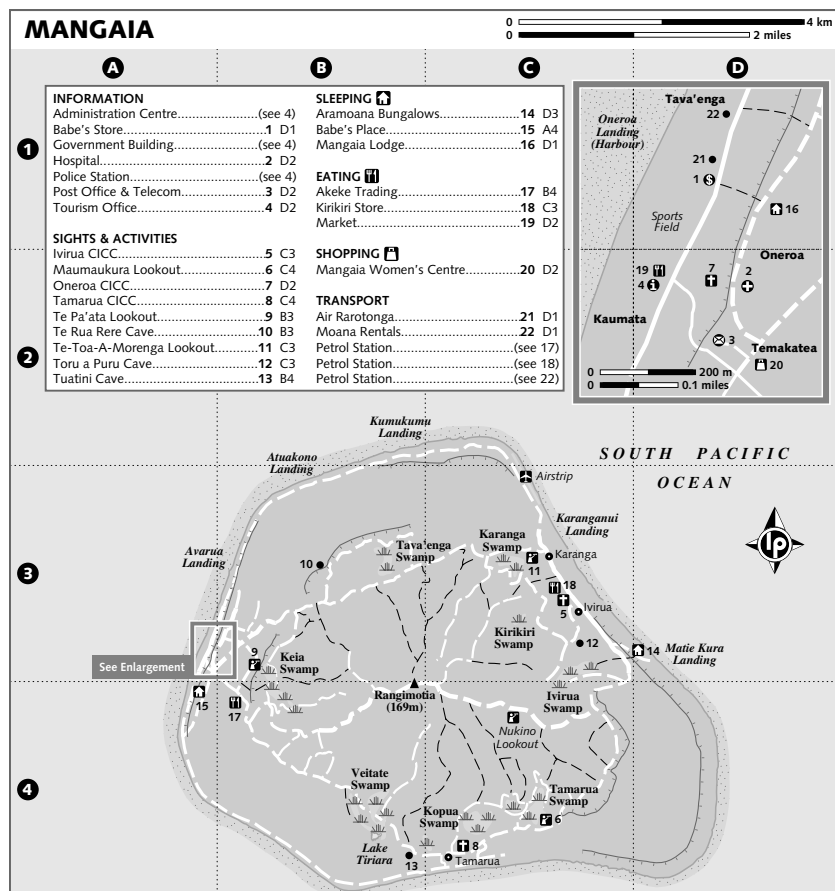
HISTORY

According to a Mangaian legend, the island wasn't settled by voyagers on canoes, but by the three sons of the Polynesian god Rongo – Rangi, Mokoaro and Akataura – who simply lifted the island up from the deep, becoming its first settlers and the ancestors of the Nga Ariki tribe.

James Cook sailed by in 1777 but met an unfriendly reception and quickly moved on. Missionary John Williams was similarly not welcome in 1823 but subsequent Polynesian missionaries had more success, and the island was eventually converted to Christianity by the Rarotongan preacher Maretu.

ORIENTATION

The three main villages are all located on the coast: Oneroa in the west, Ivirua in the east and Tamarua in the south. Oneroa, the main village, has three parts: Tava'enga and Kaumata on the northern and southern parts



of the coast respectively, and Temakatea is located above the coast. The airstrip is in the north of the island.

INFORMATION

Babe's Store (☎ 34092; Oneroa) The island's ANZ agent.
Post office & Telecom office (☎ 34680; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) On the hill above Oneroa. Internet access costs NZ\$10.50 per hour.

Visitor information centre (☎ 34289) In the Administration Centre at the bottom of the Temakatea road cutting.

TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 34888; www.airraro.com) flies between Rarotonga and Mangaia four times a week from NZ\$270 return. See p476 for

details on shipping services from Rarotonga to Mangaia.

Moana Rentals (☎ 34307) is the main place to hire motorcycles (NZ\$25 per day).

SIGHTS Churches & Marae

Mangaia has some of the finest old CICC's in the Cooks. **Tamarua CICC** is especially beautiful, and still has its original roof beams, woodcarved interiors and sennit-rope binding. The interior decoration at the churches of Oneroa and Ivrua was once even more impressive, but was mostly removed in the 1980s.

Mangaia has 24 premissionary *marae*, but you'll need a local expert to find them.

Tuare George and **Tupuna Moeara** (below) can both take you.

Rangimotia & Inland Roads

The highest point on the island, Rangimotia (169m) is more a high plateau rather than a peak, but the coastal views are stunning. From the Oneroa side, an old dirt road (suitable only for 4WDs, motorcycles and mountain bikes) leads to the top. The island's interior is cross-hatched by tracks and dirt roads, which are great for walking, but they can get very muddy after heavy rain.

There are several stunning viewpoints including **Te-Toa-A-Morenga** lookout, just inland from Ivrua; the **Maumaukura** viewpoint, which has a glorious view inland from the top of the *makatea* cliff; and **Te Pa'ata** above Oneroa.

Caves

Mangaia has many spectacular caves, including **Te Rua Rere**, a huge burial cave that has crystalline stalagmites and stalactites, and some ancient human skeletons. Other caverns worth exploring include the multilevelled **Tuatini Cave** and the long, mazelike **Toru a Poru Cave**.

TOURS

Telephone the following operators to make arrangements.

Clarke's Island Tours (☎ 34303, or Babe's Place ☎ 34092) offers a full-day island tour for NZ\$50, including visits to the inland taro plantations and Lake Tiriara, and tours to Tuatini Cave for NZ\$30.

Tere Tauakume (☎ 34223) leads a fascinating three-hour tour (NZ\$40) of several interconnected caves in the Ivrua area.

Tuare George leads a one-hour tour (NZ\$25) that passes by a number of ancient human skeletons inside Mangaia's most impressive cave, Te Rua Rere. Ask about the tour at Babe's Place (right).

Maui Peraua (☎ 34388) leads tours to his family cave of Toru a Poru (NZ\$35) and offers a cultural tour (NZ\$40) into the inland plantations.

Tupuna Moeara (☎ 34289; www.tupuna.com) Mangaia's newly appointed tourism officer is a keen historian and offers tours of the island's ancient *marae* and battlefields (NZ\$30 to NZ\$50).

SLEEPING

All the places to stay on Mangaia make some provision for food for their guests.

Babe's Place (☎ 34092; www.babesplace.co.ck; Oneroa; s/d/tr incl all meals NZ\$75/120/150) The ubiquitous Babe owns the island's main store, liveliest bar and runs this comfortable motel, just south of Oneroa. Most of the accommodation is in four motel-style units, complete with mosquito nets, colourful bedspreads and a small patio area. Babe's Bar is right next door – don't plan on getting to sleep too early on a Friday or Saturday night.

Aramoana Bungalows (☎ 34278; www.aramoana.com; Ivrua; s & d NZ\$40, bungalow s/d NZ\$60/65, medium bungalow s/d NZ\$115/135) Tucked away on the eastern side of the island, these rural, free-standing cabins are a tranquil place to stay. The tiny thatched bungalows are basically just a small wood-panelled bedroom with a tiny bathroom at the back. The larger units are more spacious and better furnished, though they're overpriced. Meals are NZ\$45 extra.

Mangaia Lodge (☎ 34324; fax 34239; Oneroa; r incl breakfast NZ\$35) This large colonial-style lodge has three plain bedrooms and a sunny, enclosed terrace overlooking the gardens. The accommodation is pretty basic, and the separate shared toilet/shower block is rustic, to say the least, but the owners are very welcoming. The price includes breakfast; otherwise, you do your own cooking (meals can be arranged by request for NZ\$10).

EATING & DRINKING

There's nowhere to eat out on Mangaia, but your meals will be provided for you wherever you stay. **Babe's Store** (☎ 34092; Tava'enga) is the best-stocked shop, but there are a few smaller stores, including **Kirikiri Store** (☎ 34133), north of Ivrua, and **Akeke Trading** (☎ 34206), inland from Oneroa. There's a weekly Friday-morning market (starting at 8am) beside the post office in Oneroa. The only decent bar is at **Babe's Place** (☎ 34092; www.babesplace.co.ck; Oneroa), open on Friday and Saturday nights.

SHOPPING

Basketwork, tie-dyed *pareu*, stone pounders and *pupu ei* are Mangaia's most famous handicrafts. Try the Mangaia Women's Council **craft shop** (☎ 8am-1pm Mon-Wed), just

south of Oneroa. Its opening hours can be erratic; if it's closed, contact the island **Administration Centre** (☎ 34289) to find out when it'll next be open. Lyn Peraua's small gift shop at the airport terminal is open for all incoming flights. The market often has some traditional crafts for sale.

NORTHERN GROUP

If it's a true island escape you're looking for, then you'll need to follow in the footsteps of the Cook Islands' most famous castaways and head for the Northern Group. Writers Tom Neale and Robert Dean Frisbie (p434) both lived out their desert-island dreams on these far-flung coral atolls, but you'll need to be a hardy traveller indeed to do the same. Flights to the Northern Group are notoriously erratic and eye-poppingly expensive, but if you can surmount the logistical challenges you'll be rewarded with a wonderland of clear lagoons, diamond-white beaches and technicolour sunsets that most visitors (and most Cook Islanders, for that matter) will never get the chance to see.

TRANSPORT

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) flies from Rarotonga to Manihiki once a week, and Pukapuka occasionally. Flights take 3½ to four hours, and the cheapest return fare starts from a whopping NZ\$1250. Bad weather, limited fuel supplies and too few bookings can sometimes cause the flights to be cancelled at short notice. Take out travel insurance to cover unavoidable delays, and bring plenty of books just in case you get stranded.

The only other regular transport to the Northern Group islands is on the inter-island cargo ships. To reach Rakahanga, the only option is to fly to Manihiki and then take a boat. Suvarrow is off limits unless you happen to have packed your own yacht. Some boats travel between Pukapuka and Samoa. For more information on inter-island cargo ships, see p476.

MANIHIKI

pop 660 / area 5.4 sq km

Famous for its black-pearl fields, the magnificent lagoon of Manihiki is one of the highlights of the Northern Group. Nearly

40 islands are scattered around the edges of the enclosed lagoon, which is 4km wide at its broadest point. Tauhunu is the main village, and there's a second village, Tukao, where you'll also find the island's airstrip. In November 1997 Cyclone Martin struck Manihiki, causing major destruction and the loss of 19 lives. Most of the buildings have now been rebuilt, but many evacuated islanders never returned.

Black pearls are the island's economic mainstay, and a tour (NZ\$50) to one of the lagoon farms is a must. If you're here from September to December, you should be able to watch some of the pearls being harvested. The lung-busting abilities of the island's pearl divers are legendary – they can dive to great depths and stay submerged for minutes at a time. Lagoon cruises (NZ\$55) and fishing trips (NZ\$50) are also available.

Manihiki Lagoon Villas (☎ 43123; www.mahihikilagoonvillas.com; s/d NZ\$150/250), a beautiful beachside retreat, offers several bungalows overlooking the lagoon, with plain but comfortable furnishings and the obligatory sea-view sundeck. You'll have to get by without amenities such as hot water and television, but with a view like this, who needs luxury?

RAKAHANGA

pop 130 / area 4.1 sq km

With two major islands and many smaller *motu* dotted in a turquoise lagoon, Rakahanga is another idyllic island, but life here is tough, even when compared to the rest of the Northern Group. The island was once more heavily populated than its sister island of Manihiki, which lies 44km to the south, but the lagoon here is unsuitable for pearl-farming and the island is now all but deserted – the few families who live here are concentrated in the village of Nivano in the southwestern corner of the atoll. The only export is copra, although the island is still renowned for its fine *rito* hats, which are mostly sold on the mainland of Rarotonga.

PENRHYN

pop 600 / area 9.8 sq km

Traditionally known as Tongareva, Penrhyn is the northernmost of the Cook Islands, and boasts one of the largest lagoons in the country – so huge that the twin islands

on opposite sides of the lagoon are barely visible from each other. Uniquely in the Northern Group, Penrhyn has three deepwater passages that make excellent harbours, a fact that attracted whalers and traders in the 19th century. Peruvian blackbirders (slave-traders) also visited the island in the 1860s – some estimates reckon that three-quarters of the population were carried off to work in Peruvian labour camps. Penrhyn is another centre for black-pearl production, and some interesting shell jewellery is produced on the island.

Soa's Guesthouse (☎ 42018; fax 42105; Omoka village; r NZ\$95) is run by Soa Tini, a local fisherman and pearl farmer, who has a three-bedroom family house in the centre of Omoka village. There's only cold water and the toilets are shared, but rates include three meals and Soa can organise trips around the lagoon.

PUKAPUKA

pop 530 / area 5.1 sq km

Well known for its sensuous dancers and beautiful girls (as well as its bed-hopping practices), the remote island of Pukapuka is in many ways closer to Samoa than it is to the rest of the Cook Islands. Like its tiny 'suburb' island of Nassau, Pukapuka sustained severe damage during the 2005 cyclones; only 10 houses survived the storms intact, while many other buildings were completely swept away. Though life is slowly getting back to normal, thanks to a massive emergency aid package, it'll be several years before crops and water sources have completely recovered.

Pukapuka's most famous resident was Robert Dean Frisbie, who lived here in the 1920s and wrote several evocative accounts of his life on the islands.

Contact the **island secretary** (☎ /fax 41712) or the **island council** (☎ 41034) to arrange homestay accommodation.

SUWARROW

pop 2 / area 0.4 sq km

The Cook Islands' only national park is a nature-lovers' paradise, home to huge colonies of seabirds and some of the country's richest marine life. Two atoll managers live here six months of the year to oversee the park and ensure visiting yachties don't misbehave; during cyclone season they head

back to Rarotonga. Suvarrow is best known as the home of Tom Neale, the Cook Islands' most famous hermit, who lived here for three long stints between 1952 and his death in 1977. You can relive his adventures in his classic book *An Island to Oneself*, and visit his old house on Anchorage Island – one room is still furnished just as it was when he lived here, and you can leave your thoughts in a logbook.

The only way you're likely to be able to visit Suvarrow is by private yacht.

RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Officially, visitors are required to have booked accommodation before arriving in the Cook Islands, although you can usually arrange a hotel when you arrive at the airport. Nevertheless, the best places on the island get booked up well in advance, and you might find there's nothing available in your budget range, so it pays to plan ahead.

Rarotonga has loads of accommodation, including hostels, motel-style units, self-contained bungalows and some expensive top-end hotels and large-scale resorts. All the major Southern Group islands have organised accommodation. For families, renting a house (p450) can be a good way to cut costs. Practically everywhere provides self-catering facilities.

Manihiki and Penrhyn are the only Northern Group islands with guesthouses. Elsewhere you may have to stay with local people; be sure to pay your way and bring food to share.

ACTIVITIES

The Cook Islands is a perfect place to kick back and relax, but if you're the energetic type there are plenty of activities to keep you occupied.

Visiting Marae

History and archaeology enthusiasts will enjoy visiting the historic *marae* on most of the islands. Many of these traditional religious meeting grounds are still used for

PRACTICALITIES

- Rarotonga's *Cook Islands News* (www.ci.news.co.ck), published daily except Sunday, and the *Cook Islands Herald*, published on Wednesday, provide coverage of local news and international events.
- Radio Cook Islands (630 kHz AM; www.radio.co.ck) reaches most of the islands and broadcasts local programmes, as well as Radio New Zealand news and Radio Australia's world news service. The smaller KC-FM (103.8 MHz FM) station can only be received on Rarotonga. There is one (very low-budget) national television station, CITV, and cable channels are available at some hotels.
- The PAL system is used in the Cooks. Video tapes and DVDs can be hired all over Rarotonga.
- Electricity is 240V AC, 50Hz, as in Australia and NZ, using Australian-style three-blade plugs. Power is available 24 hours a day throughout the Southern Group except on Mitiaro, where it runs from 5am to midnight and 24 hours a day on weekends.
- The Cook Islands uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

formal ceremonies, such as the investiture of a new *ariki* or *mataiapo*.

Water Sports

The sheltered lagoons and beaches on Rarotonga and Aitutaki are great for swimming and snorkelling. Diving is also excellent, with good visibility and lots of marine life, from sea turtles and tropical fish to reef sharks and eagle rays. See p69 for more diving information. You can hire snorkelling gear on Aitutaki and Rarotonga, as well as kayaks, sailboards and other water-sports equipment.

Glass-bottomed boats operate from Muri Beach, and there are several lagoon cruise operators in Aitutaki. Deep-sea fishing boats can be chartered on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. From July to October, whale-watching trips are available.

Other Activities

Rarotonga is an excellent place for hiking, and there are several trails to explore, from mountain tracks to valley walks. Aitutaki's backcountry roads and deserted beaches are also great for walking and exploring. 'Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Mangaia have fascinating caves to discover and countless trails winding through the *makatea*.

BUSINESS HOURS

The business week is 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and most shops are open on Saturday morning until noon. Small grocery stores keep longer hours, from 6am or 7am until 8pm or 9pm. The banks are open till 3pm on weekdays, but only the Westpac bank is open on a Saturday morning.

CHILDREN

Travelling with kids presents no special problems in the Cook Islands, although many smaller hotels and bungalows don't accept children aged under 12 – ask about their policy before booking.

CUSTOMS

The following restrictions apply: 2L of spirits or wine or 4.5L of beer, plus 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco. Quarantine laws are strictly enforced, and plants, animals or any related products are prohibited (you might also have a problem with camping gear). Firearms, weapons and drugs are also prohibited.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Swimming is very safe in the sheltered lagoons but be wary around reef passages, where currents are especially strong. Rarotonga's main passages are at Avana Harbour, Avaroa, Papua and Rutaki; they exist on other islands as well, often opposite streams.

Mosquitoes can be a real nuisance in the Cooks, particularly during the rainy season (around mid-December to mid-April). Use repellent; mosquito coils are available everywhere.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES
Cook Islands Consulates

Cook Islands' overseas consulates.
Australia (☎ 02-9907 6567; fax 9949 6664; Sir Ian Graham Turbott, 8/8 Lauderdale Ave, Fairlight, NSW 2094)

New Zealand Auckland (☎ 09-366 1100; fax 309 1876; Laveta Short, 1st fl, 127 Symonds St, PO Box 37-391); Wellington (☎ 04-472 5126; fax 472 5121; 56 Mulgrave St, PO Box 12-242, Thorndon)
USA California (☎ 805-987 0620; mets@gte.net; Metua Ngarupe, 1000 San Clemente Way, Camarillo 93010); Hawai'i (☎ 808-842 8999; fax 842 3520; Robert Worthington, Kamehameha Schools, c/o 144 Ke Ala Ola Rd, Honolulu 96817)

Consulates in the Cook Islands

Foreign consulates and high commissions on Rarotonga.

France (☎ 24021, 54424; eggelton@oyster.net.ck; contact Cassie Eggelton)

Germany (☎ 23206; contact Wolfgang Losacker)

New Zealand (☎ 22201, 55201; nzhc@oyster.net.ck; New Zealand High Commission, PO Box 21, Avarua) Above the Philatelic Bureau.

UK (☎ 20444; mitchell@oyster.net.ck; contact Mike Mitchell) On the 3rd floor of the Trustnet building in Avarua.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

April

Dancer of the Year Dance displays are held throughout April, culminating in the hotly contested Dancer of the Year competition.

July

Gospel Day 20 July on 'Atiu, 21 July on Mitiaro, 25 July on Rarotonga, and elsewhere on 26 October. The arrival of the gospel to the Cook Islands is celebrated with *nuku* (religious plays).

August

Constitution Celebration (Te Maire Nui) Celebrates the 1965 declaration of independence and is the major festival of the year in the Cook Islands.

Tiare (Floral) Festival Week Celebrated with floral float parades and the Miss Tiare beauty pageant.

HOLIDAYS

The Cook Islands has a multitude of public holidays. The celebrations are often accompanied by music, dancing and general high-jinks.

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday & Easter Monday March/April

Anzac Day 25 April

Queen's Birthday First Monday in June

Gospel Day (Rarotonga only) 25 July

Constitution/Flag-Raising Day 4 August

Gospel Day (Cook Islands) 26 October

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

You can get online at several places on Rarotonga (p437) and at just one on Aitutaki (p454). Several of the Telecom offices on the outer islands have small cyberbooths (though the connection is very slow and pricey). Wi-fi access for laptops is available at the main Internet cafés on Rarotonga.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Cook Islands News (www.cinews.co.ck) Online edition of the daily Cook Islands newspaper.

Cook Islands Tourism Authority (www.cook-islands.com) Central information site for the main tourist office.

Cook Islands Website (www.ck) Local business details, including tourist operations.

Kia Orana (www.kiaorana.com) Locally run site with plenty of history, culture and background info.

Telecom Cook Islands (www.oyster.net.ck) Searchable telephone directories plus an email directory.

MONEY
Cash

On Rarotonga there are ANZ ATMs in Avarua and at Wigmores Superstore. Westpac has ATMs in Avarua and the airport, and a small branch that's open for international flights. You can change money at the Westpac and ANZ banks in Avarua and at some hotels for a fee.

There's just one ATM on Aitutaki, but you can change money and travellers cheques at the Administration Centre. On the other

HOW MUCH?

- **Bus ticket:** NZ\$3
- **Internet access per hour:** NZ\$9
- **Island night and buffet:** NZ\$50
- **Guided tour:** NZ\$50
- **Midrange private villa with sundeck on Rarotonga:** NZ\$250

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol on Rarotonga:** NZ\$1.90
- **1L bottled water:** NZ\$3.50
- **Glass of Cook Islands Lager:** NZ\$5
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** NZ\$20
- **Ika mata:** NZ\$8
- **Bottle of noni juice:** NZ\$25

islands you'll need to take a supply of cash with you.

Credit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and Bankcard are accepted at most places on Rarotonga. The Westpac and ANZ banks in Avarua give cash advances on all three cards. Amex and Diners Club cards are accepted at upmarket hotels and restaurants. Credit cards are accepted at the larger hotels on Aitutaki and at some places on 'Atiu. Elsewhere, it's cold hard cash or nothing.

Currency

New Zealand dollars are used in the Cook Islands. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. You'll probably get a few Cook Islands coins in change (in denominations of 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1, \$2 and \$5), but if you do, make sure to spend them before you leave, as Cook Islands money cannot be exchanged anywhere else in the world.

Taxes

There's a healthy slug on top of NZ prices to cover shipping costs for imports. A 12.5% VAT (value added tax) is included in the price of most goods and services. All prices quoted in the text include VAT.

Tipping

Tipping is not customary in the Cook Islands, and haggling over prices is considered rude.

Travellers Cheques

You'll receive a better rate for travellers cheques than for cash; all brands of travellers cheques are cashed at the banks. Many of the outer islands have nowhere to change travellers cheques, so get them cashed before you leave Rarotonga.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Print film and traditional and digital processing are available on Rarotonga. High-speed film is useful in the densely forested interior of Rarotonga, and in the *makatea* of 'Atiu and Ma'uke. Bring a flash for photographing inside caves.

POST

Poste-restante mail is held for 30 days at post offices on most islands. To collect mail at the post office in Avarua it should

be addressed to you c/o Poste Restante, Avarua, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. There's no home postal delivery anywhere in the Cooks – everyone uses post office boxes.

TELEPHONE

All the islands, with the exception of Nassau, are connected to the country's modern telephone system. Each island has a Telecom office, which also provides fax, telegram and telex services.

The country code for the Cook Islands is ☎ 682, and there are no local area codes. Dial ☎ 00 for direct international calls; the international directory is ☎ 017; the local directory operator is ☎ 010. You can make collect calls from any phone by dialling ☎ 015.

Prepaid Kiaorana cards are available in NZ\$5, NZ\$10, NZ\$20 and NZ\$50 denominations from the post office, Telecom, Telepost and many shops and hotels. They can be used for local, inter-island and international phone calls and work from both public and home telephones.

If you want to use your mobile phone (cellphone) in the Cooks, you can get a local number by buying a Kokanet SIM card for NZ\$25 at the main Telecom office in Avarua.

TIME

The Cook Islands are east of the International Date Line, 10 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The country has no daylight-saving time. When it's noon in the Cooks it's 10pm in London, noon in Tahiti and Hawai'i, 2pm in LA, 10am the next day in Fiji and NZ, and 8am the next day in Sydney.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Cook Islands Tourism Corporation** (CITC; ☎ 29435; www.cook-islands.com; PO Box 14, Avarua) is in the centre of Avarua on Rarotonga.

Overseas offices:

Asia (☎ 66-2 652 0507; edkard@pit.co.th; c/o Pacific Leisure Group, 8/F Maneeva Centre, 518/5 Ploenchit Rd, Bangkok 10330, Thailand)

Australia (☎ 02-9955 0446; ausmanager@cook-islands.com; PO Box 20, Guilford, NSW 2160)

Canada (☎ 1-888 994 2665; canadamanager@cook-islands.com; 1133-160A St, White Rock, British Columbia V4A 7G9)

Continental Europe (☎ 49-30 4225 6027; europemanager@cook-islands.com; Petersburgstrasse 94, 10247 Berlin, Germany)

New Zealand (☎ 09-366 1106; nzmanager@cook-islands.com; Level 1, 127 Symonds St, Parnell, Auckland)
UK (☎ 020-7202 6369; ukmanager@cook-islands.com; Nottcut House, 36 Southwark Bridge Rd, London SE1 9EU)
USA (☎ 1-866 280 1739; usamanager@cook-islands.com; 17880 Skypark Circle, Irvine, California 92614)

VISAS

No visa is required to visit the Cooks. A visitor permit, good for 31 days, is granted on arrival on presentation of a valid passport, an onward or return airline ticket, and a confirmed hotel booking (see p471). Visitor permits can be extended up to six months at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration** (☎ 29347) in Avarua.

TRANSPORT ON RAROTONGA & THE COOK ISLANDS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The Cook Islands can be included as a stopover between the US and NZ, Australia or other Pacific islands. See p836 for round-the-world tickets and Pacific air passes.

Low-season travel to the Cooks is from mid-April to late August, and the high season runs from December to February. There's heavy demand from NZ to the Cooks in December, and in the other direction in January.

AIRLINES

Air New Zealand (www.airnewzealand.com) and **Pacific Blue** (www.virginblue.com.au) are the only international carriers that fly to the Cook Islands. Air New Zealand operates at least one daily flight from Rarotonga to Auckland (NZ), sometimes stopping in Fiji en route, as well as three weekly flights to LA via Tahiti. From Auckland you can catch regular Air New Zealand flights to other

cities in Australia, NZ and Asia, and from LA there are frequent flights to London and the rest of the US.

Pacific Blue (part of the Virgin group) operates two weekly flights from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne to Rarotonga via Auckland.

ASIA

Air New Zealand's connections to/from Tokyo are either via Fiji or Auckland. The basic fare starts from ¥240,000; cheaper fares may be available through some travel agencies – it's worth shopping around.

AUSTRALASIA

Air New Zealand has daily scheduled flights between Auckland and Rarotonga, with extra flights a couple of days a week. Standard low-season fares to Auckland start at NZ\$390, double that for return flights.

Flights from Australia to Rarotonga (and back) go via Auckland. Single fares from Sydney/Brisbane/Melbourne start at about A\$510/ 700/750 with Pacific Blue, though there are often much cheaper fares depending on availability; single fares from most Australian destinations start from around A\$480 with Air New Zealand.

NORTH AMERICA

Air New Zealand's flights from the US to the Pacific depart from LA. There are three weekly flights (currently on Monday, Thursday and Saturday), all via Pape'ete in Tahiti. Return fares start from around US\$1150/1660 in the low/high season. All Air New Zealand flights from the US follow the LA–Tahiti–Cook Islands–Fiji–Auckland route.

Travel options from Canada are similar to those from the US. From Vancouver, **Air New Zealand** (☎ 800-663-5494; www.airnewzealand.ca) return fares to Rarotonga (via LA) start from around C\$1850/2150 in the low/high season.

PACIFIC

Apart from NZ, the only Pacific islands with direct flight connections to Rarotonga are Fiji (from F\$540 return) and Tahiti (from 48,000 CFP return). If you want to visit any other island, you'll have to fly via one of these destinations.

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a NZ\$30 departure tax (NZ\$10 for children, free for under twos) when you fly out of Rarotonga.

Sea

Various cruise ships stop in at Rarotonga and other islands but they don't take on passengers. They typically arrive in the morning and depart in the afternoon, after quick island tours.

YACHT

The other sea alternative is to come by yacht, except during the cyclone season from November to March. Once you arrive on Rarotonga, fly your Q flag and visit the **Harbour Master** (☎ 28814; Avatiu Harbour, Rarotonga). Other official ports of entry are Aitutaki, Penrhyn and Pukapuka, all of which have good anchorages. The virtually uninhabited Suvarrow Atoll is another favourite with yachties, but is not an official port of entry.

There's a remote chance of catching a yacht from the Cook Islands to Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia or NZ. Check the situation at Rarotonga's Ports Authority at Avatiu Harbour, where yachties often leave messages if they are looking for crew.

GETTING AROUND

Unless you're bringing your own yacht, inter-island travel is limited to passenger ships and Air Rarotonga flights. Flights to the Northern Group islands are expensive; only Manihiki, Penrhyn and Pukapuka have airstrips.

Air

Air Rarotonga (☎ 22888; www.airraro.com) is the only domestic airline in the Cook Islands. There are several daily flights to Aitutaki, and several weekly flights between Rarotonga and the rest of the Southern Group. Planes to the Northern Group are more erratic, but there's usually a weekly flight to Manihiki and Penrhyn. The only inter-island air pass is the Island Hopper Pass (NZ\$400), between Rarotonga, Aitutaki and 'Atiu.

Boat

Flying is the easiest way to get around the Cook Islands, but if your sea legs (and land-lubber stomach) will stand it, you could hop onto an inter-island transport ship. Shipping schedules are notoriously unpredictable – weather, breakdowns and unexpected route

changes can all put a kink in your travel plans. Ships stop off at each island for just a few hours, and only Rarotonga and Penrhyn have decent harbours; at all the other islands you go ashore by lighter or barge.

Taio Shipping (☎ 24905, 24912; taio@oyster.net.ck; Avatiu Wharf) is the main inter-island shipping company in the Cooks. Its ships are far from luxury cruise liners: there's limited cabin space, and some ships have no cabins at all. Showers and toilets are available to all passengers.

It takes about a day for ships to get from Rarotonga to any of the other Southern Group islands. Each island costs NZ\$65; the Rarotonga–Mangaia–Ma'uke–Mitiaro–'Atiu–Rarotonga round trip takes four days (NZ\$260). It takes about 3½ days for ships to reach the Northern Group islands; there's a monthly Rarotonga–Manihiki–Rakahanga–Penrhyn–Rarotonga service that takes 10 to 12 days (NZ\$700 to NZ\$900 return).

The private research vessel **Bounty Bay** (☎ 23513, 52400; www.pacific-expeditions.com), based on Rarotonga, runs eco-trips around many of the more remote islands of the Cooks, including Palmerston, Takutea and Manuae.

Local Transport

All the islands are good for cycling. Rarotonga has a regular circle-island bus service, taxis and plenty of bicycles, motorcycles, cars and jeeps for hire. Aitutaki has a taxi service and bicycles, motorcycles and cars for hire. 'Atiu has a taxi service, rental motorcycles and a couple of jeeps. Ma'uke has rental motorcycles.

Hitchhiking, though not the custom, is perfectly legal. If you're walking in the outer islands, someone's bound to stop and offer you a lift before too long.

Tours

Circle-island tours on Rarotonga offer a good introduction to the island's history, geography and traditional culture. Guided tours are also offered on Aitutaki, 'Atiu, Ma'uke and Mangaia.

Rarotongan travel agencies (p437) can organise single-island or multi-island package tours. Day trips from Rarotonga to Aitutaki are available.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Samoa

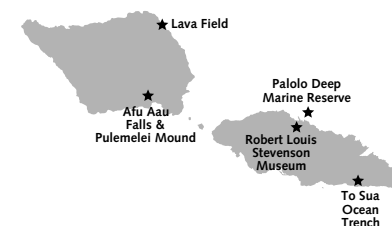
Samoa has some of the most beautiful and enticing islandscapes in the South Pacific. It's an opinion few travellers will disagree with once they've spent a few weeks rattling up steep rocky trails to stare into the overgrown maws of extinct craters, swished their way through the lush undergrowth of sprawling plantations to clamber into eerie lava tubes, and strapped on a mask before coming face to face with multicoloured coral and other marine life in the shallow waters of deliriously lovely lagoons. Some of the beaches are so stunning that you'll just want to fall over and pretend you're a piece of driftwood, and hidden within isolated valleys in the hinterlands are paradisaal waterfalls that plunge into idyllic swimming holes. Add rainforests, rugged sea cliffs, blowholes and lava flows into the mix, and you can begin to appreciate the enigmatic physical nature of these islands.

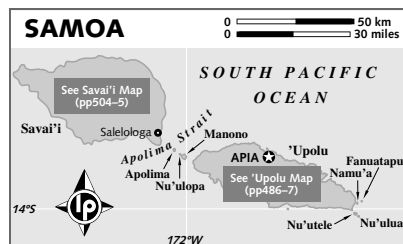
The inhabitants of Samoa have taken a few cues from their languid tropical home. Samoans are never in much of a hurry to do anything, a trait which tends to incite culture shock and a mild, temporary panic in visitors who have arrived from schedule-centric, clock-watching societies. And Samoans' moods can sometimes change as quickly as the tropical weather, with bright outlooks giving way to stormy fronts before inevitably clearing up again. But most conspicuously, they are also famously hospitable: Samoans are rarely short of a toothy grin, a flap of the hand or a friendly comment where outsiders are concerned.

So don't underestimate how much time you'll want to spend tramping into Samoa's wild interior, bobbing around its lagoons or lying on one of its sun-baked beaches. Follow the lead of Samoa's generous spirit and just spoil yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drift through spectacular coral colonies at **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** (p489)
- Submerge yourself in the jungle pool at **Afu Aau Falls** (p508) before standing atop enigmatic **Pulemelei Mound** (p508)
- Stroll the historic corridors of Villa Vailima at the **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum** (p492)
- Admire the eerie desolation of the **Lava Field** (p506)
- Gaze up at the sky while floating around **To Sua Ocean Trench** (p493)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Weatherwise, the most comfortable time to visit Samoa is between May and October, during the country's dry season. An extra incentive to visit at this time of year is that this is when major Samoan festivals are held. During the wet season from November to April, the islands tend to squelch underfoot and receive the occasional battering from tropical cyclones; the last big storm to hit the region was Olaf, which blew across the area in early 2005. Huge numbers of Samoans jet in from New Zealand (NZ), Australia and the USA during the December–January holiday period, when you may have trouble booking flights.

The average annual temperature is 26.5°C in coastal areas, with a decrease in temperature as the land rises inland, while humidity averages around 80%. For more climatic information, see p827.

HISTORY

Prehistory

The oldest evidence of human occupation in Samoa is Lapita village, partially submerged in the lagoon at Mulifanua on the island of 'Upolu. Carbon tests date the site at 1000 BC. For more on Lapita, see p39.

SAMOA FACTS

- **Capital City (and island):** Apia ('Upolu)
- **Population:** 165,000
- **Land area:** 2934 sq km
- **International telephone code:** 685
- **Currency:** Samoan tala (ST)
- **Languages:** Samoan, English
- **Greetings:** *talofa*; *malo* (informal)
- **Website:** www.visitsamoa.ws

Archaeologists have discovered more than 100 star-shaped stone platforms across 'Upolu, Savai'i and Manono. It's believed that these platforms, dubbed 'star mounds' (see p529), were used to snare wild pigeons, which was once a favoured pastime of *matai* (chiefs). Also on Savai'i is the pyramid of Pulemelei, the largest ancient structure in the Pacific.

Around AD 950, warriors from nearby Tonga established their rule on Savai'i, and then moved on to 'Upolu. They were eventually repelled by Malietoa Savea, a Samoan chief whose title, *Malie toa* (Brave warrior), was derived from the shouted tributes of the retreating Tongans; the present nonagenarian head of state in Samoa bears this same proud title. There was also contact with Fiji, from where legends say two girls brought the art of tattooing. The Samoans never really trusted their neighbours – *togafiti* (tonga fiji) means a trick.

European Contact

Whalers, pirates and escaped convicts apparently introduced themselves to Samoa well before the first officially recorded European arrival in the region. This was the Dutchman Jacob Roggeveen, who approached the Manu'a Islands (as they are now known) in American Samoa in 1722. Other visitors followed in his wake and over the next 100 years numerous Europeans settled in. The settlers established a society in Apia and a minimal code of law in order to govern their affairs, all with the consent of 'Upolu chiefs who maintained sovereignty in their own villages. Besides technological expertise, however, the *palagi* (Westerners) unfortunately also brought with them diseases to which the islanders had no immunity.

Missionaries

In August 1830, missionaries John Williams and Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived at Sapa'alai'i on Savai'i's eastern coast. They were followed by Methodist and Catholic missionaries, and in 1888 Mormons added to the competition for souls. Samoans were quite willing to accept Christianity due to the similarity of Christian creation beliefs to Samoan legend, and because of a prophecy by war goddess Nafanua that a new religion would take root in the islands. Although inter-

IN THE NAME OF CLARITY

The Samoan islands actually comprise two separate political entities: Samoa and American Samoa (p519). Samoa was formerly known as Independent Samoa (or Western Samoa). But in July 1997 the island nation officially adopted the name 'Samoa', which is how we refer to it throughout this book.

district warfare was not abolished until the start of the 20th century, schools and education were eagerly adopted.

Squabbling Powers

There were (and still are) four paramount titles relating to four *'aiga* (extended families), equivalent to royal dynasties, in what is now Samoa: Malietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Mata'afa and Tu'imaleali'ifano. During the 1870s a civil dispute broke out between two of these families, dividing Samoa. Much land was sold to Europeans by Samoans seeking to acquire armaments to settle the matter.

The British, Americans and Germans then set about squabbling over Samoan territory, and by the late 1880s Apia Harbour was crowded with naval hardware from all three countries. Most of it subsequently sunk – not because of enemy firepower, but because of a cyclone that struck the harbour in March

1889. After several attempted compromises, the Tripartite Treaty was signed in 1899, giving control of western Samoa to the Germans and eastern Samoa to the Americans.

Foreign Administration

In February 1900 Dr Wilhelm Solf was appointed governor and the German trading company DHPG began to import thousands of Melanesians and Chinese to work on its huge plantations. But although the Germans had agreed to rule 'according to Samoan custom', they didn't keep their word. Three years after the eruption of Mt Matavanu on Savai'i destroyed Sale'aula village, there was an eruption of human discontent in 1908 with the organisation of the Mau a Pule (Mau Movement) by Namulau'ulu Lauaki Mamoe. In January 1909 Namulau'ulu and his chief supporters were sent into exile.

In 1914, at the outbreak of WWI, Britain persuaded nearby NZ to seize German Samoa. Preoccupation with affairs on the home front prevented Germany from resisting. Under the NZ administration, Samoa suffered a devastating outbreak of influenza in 1919; more than 7000 people (one-fifth of the population) died, further fuelling anger with the foreign rulers. Along with increasing calls for independence by the Mau Movement, this culminated in the authorities opening fire on a demonstration at the courthouse in Apia in 1929. Eleven

WHEN IT'S RAINING CATS & DOGS

Jan Allen is about to face another day of desexing. She and her colleagues wait in a remote Samoan village for their clients to arrive. A small boy carries in a dog almost as big as himself. A young family brings a litter of female puppies. A man arrives on a bicycle carrying three cats in a rice sack. Jan whips out a scalpel and gets to work.

Jan is a veterinarian with the **Animal Protection Society of Samoa (APS)** (www.samoa.ws/aps), placed by **Australian Volunteers International** (www.australianvolunteers.com). Her role is to provide animal health services in remote areas.

Samoa has large numbers of unwanted and unclaimed dogs and cats. These animals pose a significant health risk, especially in poor or rural areas, so the APS has embarked on a nationwide desexing programme to reduce the population. The programme includes regular village visits, where APS vets examine and desex animals, and humanely euthanise sick or neglected animals.

Jan reports that the programme is slowly but steadily making progress. 'The village visits are always successful in the numbers of animals treated, and also provide a wealth of community education. We have returned to villages five times because it's become the 'cool' thing to get your dog desexed.'

As the sun sets, Jan and her colleagues pack up and head back to the truck. They've picked up some extra cargo – the female puppies, for whom they'll find a home in Apia. Another day is over, and the rain of cats and dogs has slightly eased.

FA'ALAVELAVE *Martin Robinson*

Fa'alavelave (lavish gift-exchange ceremonies) are a fundamental part of the *fa'a* Samoa (Samoan way). It could be a wedding, funeral, title-installation or the opening of a new school or church; the basics are the same and can last all day. Everyone dresses up in dazzling colours as the *'aiga* (extended families), village or church shows off their wealth and status. This is measured in terms of *ie toga* (fine mats) and money gifts as well as the feast of pork, taro, chop suey and cakes. An *'ava* (kava) ceremony involves the *matai* (chiefs) and honoured guests. Then the *tulafale* (orators or talking chiefs) make long, poetic speeches, and generous gifts of *ie toga*, food and money are exchanged by different groups. A careful note is made of all these exchanges and everything is done with a flourish. Afterwards youth groups may put on a *fiafia* (a village play or musical) with music and group dances.

It takes months to raise the money and weeks of hard work to organise these events. In American Samoa major ceremonies involve thousands of kilos of food, thousands of *ie toga* and tens of thousands of dollars. The large remittances sent back to their *'aiga* on the islands by Samoans abroad are another burdensome *fa'alavelave*, and are at the expense of their own, often struggling, families. Politics is also caught up in the system and before elections constituents receive *o'o* (gifts). Seven villages in one constituency received 20 cattle, 10 pigs, 150 boxes of salted beef, 400 cartons of herring and \$20,000 from one candidate. Democracy is more about *'aiga* alliances and *fa'alavelave* than a choice about policies.

Martin Robinson lived on Samoa for a year and got to know the islands from the grass roots by staying with hospitable families in small villages on all the main islands.

Samoans, including the Mau leader Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, were killed.

Following a change of government (and policy) in NZ, Western Samoa's independence was acknowledged as inevitable and even desirable, and in 1959 Prime Minister Fiamē Mata'afa was appointed. The following year a formal constitution was adopted and, on 1 January 1962, independence was finally achieved.

Since Independence

The Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) has been in power for most of the period since independence. Economic development has been excruciatingly slow or nonexistent, far below population growth, but at least the country has been politically stable.

'Upolu and Savai'i have been battered by several huge tropical storms over the past two decades, beginning with cyclone Ofa in February 1990 and cyclone Val in December 1991. The most recent storm to hit the island was Olaf in February 2005, though damage turned out to be much less than at first feared.

THE CULTURE

Many visitors correctly sense that below the surface of the outwardly friendly and casual Samoan people lies a complex code

of traditional etiquette. Beneath the light-heartedness, the strict and demanding *fa'a* Samoa (the Samoan way) is upheld with expectations that can stifle individuality and enterprise.

The National Psyche

Each Samoan *nu'u* (village) comprises a group of *'aiga* that include as many relatives as can be claimed. The larger an *'aiga*, the more powerful it is, and to be part of a powerful *'aiga* is the goal of all tradition-minded Samoans. Each *'aiga* is headed by a *matai*, who represents the family on the *fono* (village council). *Matai* are elected by all adult members of the *'aiga* and can be male or female, but over 90% of current *matai* are male.

The *fono* consists of the *matai* of all of the *'aiga* associated with the village. The *ali'i* (high chief of the village) sits at the head of the *fono*. In addition, each village has one *pulenu'u* (a combination of mayor and police chief), and one or more *tulafale* (orator or talking chief). The *pulenu'u* acts as an intermediary between the village and the national government, while the *tulafale* liaises between the *ali'i* and outside entities, carries out ceremonial duties and engages in ritual debates.

Beneath the *matai*, members of a village are divided into four categories. The society

of untitled men, the *aumaga*, are responsible for growing the village food. The *auluma* is the society of unmarried, widowed or separated women. They are responsible for providing hospitality and producing various goods such as *ie toga* (fine mats) and *siapo* (decorated bark cloth). Married women are called *faletua ma tauti*. Their role revolves around serving their husband and his family. The final group is the *tamaiti* (children). Close social interaction is generally restricted to members of one's own group.

Individuals are subordinate to the extended family. There is no 'I', only 'we'. The lazy or incapable are looked after by their family rather than by taxpayers, and with such onerous family (plus village and church) obligations, it's a struggle for any individual to become wealthy. Life is not about individual advancement or achievement, but about serving and raising up the status of your *'aiga*. Unfortunately the communal ownership of land and lack of reward for individual effort cripples economic development.

Lifestyle

Parents and other relatives treat babies with great affection, but at the age of three years the children are made the responsibility of an older sibling or cousin. *Fa'aaloalo* is respect for elders, the most crucial aspect of the *fa'a* Samoa, and children are expected to

obey not just their immediate relatives, but all the *matai* and adults in the village as well as older siblings. Parents rarely hug or praise their children, so the youth often suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence and ambition. Parents also routinely resort to violence to punish their children. Fun family activities are few and far between; a rare exception is White Sunday in October, when children eat first, star in church services and are bought new clothes and toys. Some teenagers resort to *musu*, which is refusing to speak to anybody as a form of protest. For a desperate few the only escape is suicide, and the youth suicide rate remains tragically high despite attempts at reducing it.

Samoans generally share the attitude of other fundamental Christians and dislike gay men and women, but this is tempered by a generally tolerant attitude to *fa'afafine* – men who dress and behave like women. *Fa'afafine* see themselves as women trapped in a man's body and have traditionally been outsiders who played the role of satirical jester and entertainer.

Speaking of religion, every village has at least one large church, ideally a larger one than in neighbouring villages. These operate as the village social centre, the place where almost everyone makes an appearance on Sunday, dressed up in their formal best. Sunday morning church services

IT'S JUST NOT CRICKET

One of the primary requirements for any serious *kirikiti* player is the ability to dance and play cricket at the same time. Tapu Misa, a columnist with the *Samoa Observer*, has pointed out that this is something that few Test cricketers have been able to demonstrate. Nor can they whistle and handclap in chorus while attempting to catch a ball.

Kirikiti is a unique South Pacific version of the English game of cricket and is a great example of how an imported measure of civilisation has been adapted to suit Samoan needs. The willow bat became a three-sided club of a size that would make any warlord happy, and the ball was fashioned out of rubber – all the better to be catapulted into the local lagoon. This is a colourful game, too – Samoans keep their whites for church on Sunday; the runs are made in *lava-lava* (wraparound sarong) and sandals.

And the rules? Well, it's just not cricket. There can be any number of players in a Samoan team, which means a game can continue for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. But there's none of that 'stand and watch the grass grow' stuff about this game either. As the batsman swings at every ball, the leader of the opposite team jumps up and down and blows his whistle incessantly in a kind of syncopated rhythm. The rest of the team also gyrates, clapping hands in rhythmic harmony, at the same time watching for an opportunity to catch out the rival. Only when all the batsmen of the opposing team have been dismissed does the other team get its chance.

It's energetic, exuberant and lots of fun. From June to September you'll see it in every village just before sunset.

are inevitably followed by *to'onai* (Sunday lunch), when families put on banquets fit for royalty.

Sa, which means 'sacred', is the nightly vespers, though it's not applied strictly and not all villages enforce it. Sometime between 6pm and 7pm a village gong sounds, signifying that the village should prepare for *sa*. When the second gong is sounded, *sa* has begun. All activity should come to a halt. If you're caught in a village during *sa*, stop what you're doing, sit down and quietly wait for the third gong, about 10 or 15 minutes later, when it's over.

'Ava (kava) is a drink derived from the ground root of the pepper plant. The 'ava ceremony is a ritual in Samoa, and every government and *matai* meeting is preceded by one.

Population

The population of Samoa is around 165,000, the vast majority of whom are Polynesian Samoans. Most Samoans live on the island of 'Upolu or its tiny satellite islands; the urban area of Apia houses around 25% of the national population. A tiny ethnic minority is the Chinese Samoan community in Apia, which is prominent in the retail and restaurant sectors.

SPORT

On weekday afternoons, young Samoans gather on the *malae* (village green) to play rugby, volleyball and *kirikiti* (see the boxed text, p481). *Fautasi* (45-man canoe) races are held on special occasions. Samoa's biggest competitive sport is rugby and the main stadium is at Apia Park. The national team is Manu Samoa and Samoans also play for rugby teams in many countries.

Among women, the most popular sport is netball. Many Samoans play for the world-beating NZ netball team.

ARTS Architecture

Traditional (not to mention highly practical) Samoan architecture is exemplified by the *fale*, an oval structure with wooden posts but no walls, thus allowing 'natural' air-conditioning. It's traditionally built on a stone or coral rock foundation and thatched with woven palm or sago leaves. Woven coconut-leaf blinds can be pulled

down to protect against rain or prying eyes, but in truth, privacy in such a building is practically impossible.

Palagi-style square homes with walls, louver windows and doors, though uncomfortably hot and requiring fans, have more status than traditional *fale* and are becoming more common in Samoa.

Fiafia

Originally, the *fiafia* was a village play or musical presentation in which participants would dress in a variety of costumes and accept money or other donations. These days the term '*fiafia* night' often refers to a lavish presentation of Samoan dancing and singing staged at large hotels and accompanied by a buffet dinner. But traditional *fiafia* are still performed during weddings, birthdays, title-conferring ceremonies and at the opening of churches and schools.

Drummers keep the beat while dancers sing traditional songs illustrated by coordinated hand gestures. A *fiafia* traditionally ends with the *siva*, a slow and fluid dance performed by the village *taupou* (usually the daughter of a high chief), dressed in *siapo* and with her body oiled seductively.

Literature

Albert Wendt is Samoa's most renowned novelist and scholar. His many novels deal with the *fa'a* Samoa bumping against *palagi* ideas and attitudes. His greatest novel is *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*. *Sons For The Return Home* is an earlier, best-selling novel, set in 1970s NZ and Samoa, that tells the story of two lovers (one white, one Samoan) and their families' response to their relationship.

Performance poet and writer Sia Figiel's powerful first novel, *Where We Once Belonged*, tells the exuberant story of a young girl growing up and searching for identity in a traditional Samoan village. The in-your-face, episodic novel de-romanticises Western perceptions of Pacific island women and tackles head-on issues such as domestic violence and youth suicide.

The Beach at Falesa by Robert Louis Stevenson is a brilliant short story set in Samoa by a master stylist with inside knowledge of the South Pacific. For more detail on Stevenson's intimate connection with Samoa, where he spent the last four years of his life, see p492.

Music

Samoan songs are usually written to tell stories or commemorate events, most of which are sad and stirring. Love songs are the most popular, followed by patriotic songs extolling local virtues. *We are Samoa* by Jerome Grey is Samoa's unofficial national anthem.

Don't leave without hearing at least one church choir. Traditional music is normally sung in Samoan but can still be enjoyed by visitors. A dozen villages still maintain brass bands, which date back to German rule; the top one is the Police Brass Band, which marches from the police station in Apia every weekday at 7.45am and performs as the national flag is raised in front of the government offices.

Contemporary artists who have had success overseas include Katrina, Random and Aniseti Falemoe. King Kapisu and Scribe are the lords of hip-hop in NZ.

Siapo & le Toga

The bark cloth known as *siapo* is made from the inner bark of the *u'a* (paper mulberry tree) and provides a medium for some of the loveliest artwork in Samoa.

The fine mat called *ie toga* is woven from pandanus fibres split into widths of just a couple of millimetres and involves years of painstaking work. When finished, it has the look and feel of fine linen or silk. *Ie toga*, along with *siapo*, make up 'the gifts of the women' that must be exchanged at every

formal Samoan ceremony. Agricultural products comprise 'the gifts of the men'.

Tattooing

Samoa is the last of the Polynesian nations where traditional tattooing is still widely practised (albeit against the wishes of many religious leaders). The traditional *pe'a* (male tattoo) normally covers the man's body from the waist to the knees. Women can elect to receive a *malu* (female tattoo), but their designs cover only the thighs.

The skills and tools of the *tufuga pe'a* (tattoo artist) were traditionally passed down from father to son, and sharpened shark teeth or boar tusks were used to carve the intricate designs into the skin. It was believed that the man being tattooed must not be left alone in case the *aitu* (spirits) took him. In most cases the procedure takes at least a fortnight. Noncompletion would cause shame to the subject and his 'aiga.

LANGUAGE

Samoan is the main language spoken, although most people also speak English as a second language. In Samoan, the 's' replaces the 'h' of many other Polynesian languages, 'l' replaces 'r', and a glottal stop replaces 'k'. Therefore, the Tahitian word for 'one', *tahi*, is *tasi* in Samoan, *rua* (two) is *lua*, and *ika* (Rarotongan for 'fish') is *i'a*. The soft 'ng' sound in Samoan is written as a 'g' (*palangi*, for example, is pronounced 'pah-lah-ngee').

ILLUSTRATING SAMOA

The full-bodied *pe'a* (male tattoo), which extends from the waist to just below the knees, is a prized status symbol in Samoa. It can take several weeks to complete and is a very painful process. Thus, anyone who undergoes the ritual is considered to be extremely brave. Any adult member can, in effect, receive a *pe'a* if the 'aiga, *tufuga* (tattoo artist) and village leaders agree that it is suitable.

The *tufuga tatatau* (master tattooist) is considered an artist and the visual arts in Samoa have been represented by the designs of the *pe'a* and the *siapo* (bark cloth). The *tufuga* is usually paid with traditional gifts of *ie toga* and food.

Tattooing was discouraged when the missionaries came, but as young Pacific islanders take more pride in their cultural heritage, there has been a revival of interest in the traditional designs, though with a contemporary twist.

The contemporary tattoo sported by many young, more Westernised Samoans, comes without social and cultural restrictions. But the designs may signify a person's 'aiga, ancestors, reference to nature or something very personal. The wrist and armband tattoos may have been originally developed for tourists, but they are now a popular Samoan fashion and many young Samoans sport a wrist, arm or ankle tattoo of their own design. They can be made with the modern machine or by the traditional comb.

Samoa basics

Hello.	<i>Talofa or Malo.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tofa.</i>
How are you?	<i>O a mai 'oe?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Manuia (fa'afetai).</i>
Please.	<i>Fa'amolemole.</i>
Thanks (very much).	<i>Fa'afetai (tele).</i>
Yes.	<i>Ioe.</i>
No.	<i>Leai.</i>
2 beers please.	<i>E lua pia fa'amole mole.</i>

ENVIRONMENT Geography

Samoa lies in the heart of the vast South Pacific, 3700km southwest of Hawai'i. Tonga lies to the south, Fiji to the southwest, Tuvalu to the northwest and Tokelau to the north, while to the southeast are the Cook Islands and Tahiti.

The country has a total land area of 2934 sq km and is composed primarily of high, eroded volcanic islands with narrow coastal plains. It has two large islands: Savai'i (1700 sq km) and 'Upolu (1115 sq km). The nation's highest peak, Mt Silisili on Savai'i, rises to 1866m. The small islands of Manono and Apolima lie in the 22km-wide Apolima Strait that separates 'Upolu and Savai'i. A few other tiny, uninhabited rocky islets and outcrops lie southeast of 'Upolu.

Ecology

On the heights of Savai'i and 'Upolu is temperate forest vegetation: tree ferns, grasses, wild coleus and epiphytic plants. The magnificent *aoa* (banyan tree) dominates the higher landscapes of these islands, while other areas are characterised by scrublands, marshes, pandanus forests and mangrove swamps. The rainforests of Samoa are a natural apothecary, home to some 75 medicinal plant species.

Because Samoa is relatively remote, few animal species have managed to colonise it. The Lapita brought with them domestic pigs, dogs and chickens, as well as the ubiquitous Polynesian rat. But apart from two species of fruit bat (protected throughout the islands after being hunted close to extinction) and the small, sheath-tailed bat, mammals not introduced by humans are limited to the marine varieties. Whales, dolphins and porpoises migrate north and

BEST EATING

Eating experiences in Samoa range from seafood snacks to international meals prepared with a Polynesian twist. The following are Lonely Planet's top five mealtime indulgences in the islands:

- Order a takeaway meal of fresh fish and uber-salty chips from Gourmet Seafood (p500), swing by a supermarket to get a cold bottle of Vaillima beer, and join the happy throng on Apia's breakwater as the sun goes down.

Errol Hunt, commissioning editor

- OK, pizza isn't exactly a Samoan speciality, but the convivial, down-to-earth atmosphere of the waterfront Italiano Pizza Bar (p500) eatery in Apia makes it a great place to stuff your face while chatting with talkative locals and expats.

Paul Smitz, author, Samoa chapter

- Some great food is served at Sails (p501), upstairs in the old colonial building where Robert Louis Stevenson was said to have lived when he first arrived in Apia.

Tony Wheeler, LP cofounder

- Snorkel with brightly coloured (and no doubt slightly endangered) reef fish all day, then sit down to delicious fried reef fish beside your Lalomanu fale (p498) for dinner. That's synchronicity!

Errol Hunt, commissioning editor

- Have one of the fine lunches and dinners at Lusía's Lagoon Chalets (p509) – and one of the delicious, freshly baked desserts too! – delivered onto the private deck of your stilt-raised fale, where you can eat it while staring out over the gentle waters of a secluded cove.

Paul Smitz, author, Samoa chapter

south through the islands, depending on the season.

Pili (skinks) and *mo'o* (geckos) can be seen everywhere, and various types of turtles visit the islands. The only land creature to beware of (besides the unloved and unlovely dogs) is the giant centipede, which packs a surprisingly nasty bite.

'UPOLU

pop 110,000 / area 1115 sq km

Samoa's second-largest island is a tropical daydream come true. Outside the crowded exuberance of the main town and national capital, Apia, are small villages where cars are expected to make way for pedestrians and livestock, beaches that are minimally imprinted by human visitation, and a hilly interior that hides secretive lakes and waterfalls. Most visitors devote themselves to the dazzling strips of sand that skirt 'Upolu's shoreline, with occasional forays into the pristine offshore lagoons to poke their noses into coral groves and schools of fish. But you can also hike into tangled,

'UPOLU IN...

Two Days

After arriving in Apia, head straight to **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** (p489) to snorkel its idyllic depths. Then visit the stately **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum** (p492) before returning to Apia for a meal at the sociable **Italiano Pizza Bar** (p500) and a drink at **Paddles** (p501). Head east for a float in **Fatumea Pool** (p493) before plopping yourself on gorgeous **Lalomanu Beach** (p493) for the rest of the day. The next morning, travel west to the magnificent **To Sua Ocean Trench** (p493), peaceful **Togitogiga Recreation Reserve** (p494), and the lava cliffs at **O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park** (p494). Explore more **south coast beaches** (p494) before returning to Apia.

Four Days

There are numerous options for expanding your two-day itinerary. In Apia, put aside a night to see a high-energy **fiafia** (p503). Allow more time at Villa Vaillima to wander the surrounding **Mt Vaea Scenic Reserve** (p492), followed by a peek at the nearby **Bahá'í House of Worship** (p492). A day trip (or overnight stay) on quiet **Manono** (p495) is also a must. If you feel you've experienced enough of 'Upolu beach life, you can always zip across to **Savai'i** (p503) to climb volcanoes, stand astride ancient monuments and scale a giant banyan tree.

little-explored rainforest, check out rough coastal cliffs formed by the cooling of lava rivers, adopt an old-world manner in a colonial manor, and enjoy the company and cultural teachings of congenial locals.

ORIENTATION

The sealed Main Coast Rd winds its way around 'Upolu's coast, while three cross-island roads pass over the island's east-west central ridge and divide it roughly into quarters. The central one begins in Apia at Falealili St before becoming The Cross Island Rd further south, where it passes close to 'Upolu's highest peak, Mt Fito (1028m). There's another Cross Island Rd to the west and the steeper, picturesque Le Mafa Pass Rd in the east.

The Samoan capital, Apia, dominates the central north coast with its domestic sprawl. The hub for international flights is Faleolo Airport, located 35km west of Apia; for info on transport to/from the airport, see p488.

Maps

Hema has published a detailed, though somewhat dated, *Samoa* map (ST10) which includes a plan of Apia. Jasons distributes the basic fold-out *Samoa Visitor Map* (free), which also sketches Apia's street grid and is widely distributed in local hotels. Both maps are available from the Tourism Authority.

INFORMATION Bookshops

CCK Store (Map pp490–1; Convent St, Apia) Has several shelves of used paperbacks upstairs.

Le Tusi Faitau (Map pp490–1; ☎ 31626; Lvl 2, Wesley Arcade, Methodist Church Bldg, Beach Rd, Apia) Has an excellent range of second-hand pulp fiction.

Internet Access

iPasifika (Map pp490–1; ☎ 29919; www.ipasifika.net; Beach Rd, Apia)

LeSamoa.net (Map pp490–1; ☎ 21016; lesa@lesamoanet.net; Lotemau Centre, cnr Convent & Mt Vaea Sts, Apia)

Travellers' Lounge (Map pp490–1; ☎ 22144; Beach Rd, Apia)

Medical Services

MedCen Hospital (Map pp486–7; ☎ 26519, 26323; medcen@ipasifika.net; The Cross Island Rd, Vaillima) Has a 24-hour emergency department. A doctor is on site from 9am to 10pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to noon Saturday and Sunday. A consultation costs ST\$5.



Samoa Pharmacy (Map pp490–1; ☎ 20355; Mulinu'u Rd, Apia; ☎ 8am–noon, 1.30–4.30pm & 6–10pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon & 6–10pm Sat, 10am–noon & 6–10pm Sun)

Money

ANZ Bank (Map pp490–1; ☎ 69999; Beach Rd, Apia)
ANZ's Beach Rd branch has a pair of ATMs. There's also an ANZ ATM at Faleolo Airport.

National Bank of Samoa (Map pp490–1; ☎ 23076; Beach Rd, Apia) Also has a branch at Apia's Maketi Fou which is open on Saturday morning.

Westpac Bank (Map pp490–1; ☎ 20000; Beach Rd, Apia) Has an ATM out front.

Post

Main post office (Map pp490–1; Post Office St, Apia)
Apia's main post office has been incorporated into the

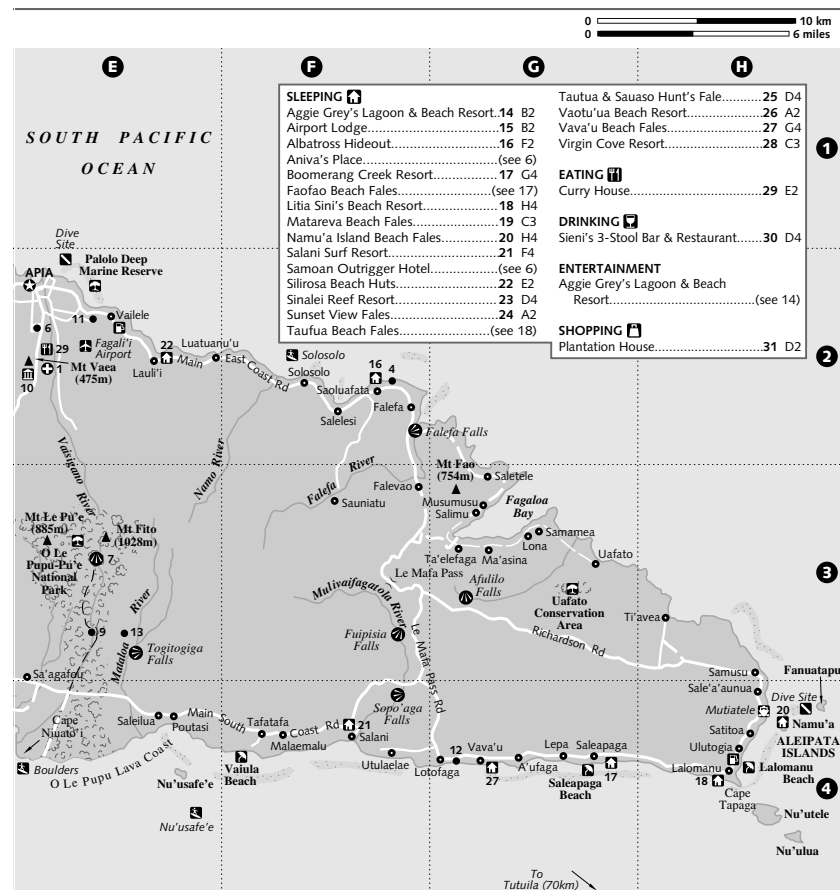
head office of the country's telecommunications provider, SamoaTel.

Poste restante office (Map pp490–1; Post Office St, Apia) For poste restante, go to the separate office, two doors from the main lobby. Have mail addressed to your care of: Poste Restante, Chief Post Office, SamoaTel, Apia, Samoa.

Tourist Information

Samoa Hotels Association (Map pp490–1; ☎ 30160; Beach Rd, Apia; ☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) This extremely helpful organisation can make accommodation bookings around 'Upolu and Savai'i. It's located within the Samoa Tourism Authority fale.

Samoa Tourism Authority (Map pp490–1; ☎ 63500; www.visitsamoa.ws; Beach Rd, Apia; ☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, to noon Sat) Over repeated visits we unfortunately found



Tourism Authority staff uninterested and unhelpful. Hopefully their service has improved by the time you read this.

Travel Agencies

Island Hopper Vacations (Map pp490–1; ☎ 23388; www.islandhoppervacations.com; Lotemau Centre, cnr Convent & Mt Vaea Sts, Apia) Also has a desk at Faleolo Airport (☎ 42938), though opening hours are haphazard.

Oceania Travel & Tours (Map pp490–1; ☎ 24443; www.samoa-travel.com; Hotel Kitano Tusitala, Mulinu'u Rd, Apia)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR
All international flights to Samoa arrive at Faleolo Airport, west of Apia. For details of international services, see p516.

Polynesian Airlines (Map pp490–1; ☎ 21261; www.polynesianairlines.com; NPF Bldg, Beach Rd, Apia) flies the 15-minute route between Fagali'i Airport, just east of Apia, and Ma'ota Airport, 5km west of Salelologa on Savai'i. The fare is from ST50/95 one way/return.

BOAT

Ferries tackle the 22km Apolima Strait between 'Upolu and Savai'i every day. Tickets cost ST9/65 per person/car. Large ferries depart the Mulifanua Wharf on 'Upolu (and the Salelologa Wharf on Savai'i) every two hours between 6am and 4pm Wednesday to Monday, while a smaller ferry serves this route at less regular intervals on Tuesday.

Vehicles should be prebooked through the **Samoa Shipping Corporation** (in Apia ☎ 20935, in Salelologa 51477). Before putting your car on the ferry at Mulifanua Wharf, you must have its underside cleaned (free) at the spraying station 100m before the boat terminal. This is done to prevent the spread of the Giant African Snail. Present the quarantine card at the ferry.

For details of boat services to Manono, see the section about that island (p495). Similarly, see the Apolima section (p495) for info on organising transport to that island.

For info on international boat services between 'Upolu and both American Samoa and Tokelau, see p516.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

To get to Faleolo Airport from Apia, take any bus marked 'Pasi o le Va'a' or 'Faleolo' (ST2); note that the last bus leaves Apia at 2.30pm. Alternatively, catch the airport shuttle operated by **Samoa Scenic Tours** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; Aggie Grey's Hotel, Beach Rd, Apia). Tickets (ST15) must be prebooked and the shuttle picks up from any central Apia hotel. This shuttle only runs from Apia to the airport, not vice versa.

Taxis between Apia and Faleolo Airport cost ST40.

BUS

Buses connecting Apia with almost every other part of 'Upolu leave from Maketi Fou (the main market) and from behind the Flea Market. The routes, however, are rarely straightforward, as drivers often circle the town centre until they fill the bus and are liable to veer off-route to deposit locals at their front doors. Buses begin running early in the morning and stop in the early afternoon.

A bus schedule for 'Upolu that includes fare information is available from the **Samoa Tourism Authority** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 63500; www.visitsamoa.ws; Beach Rd, Apia; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat). To reach the Aleipata district at the eastern end of the island, catch the Lalomanu bus. To head east along the north coast, take the Falefa, Fagaloa or Lotofaga bus. For any point along The Cross Island Rd, take either the Si'umu or Salani bus. For Togitogiga and O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park, take the Falealili or Salani bus. Sample fares from Apia include to Robert

Louis Stevenson Museum (ST1.20), Falefa (ST2), Faleolo Airport (ST2), Mulifanua Wharf (ST2), Virgin Cove (ST2.30) and Lalomanu (ST4).

CAR

Unless heavy rain has turned unsealed side roads into bogs, you can drive throughout 'Upolu in a high-clearance 2WD vehicle. Petrol stations are almost exclusively found in and around Apia. For information on getting a temporary driving licence, see p518.

Apia has numerous car-hire agencies. Prices start at around ST120 per day, with discounts offered for longer-term rentals. Hire cars are subject to a ST2500 insurance excess (nonreduceable) in the event of any accident that's your fault. Most outfits allow you to put their vehicles on the ferry to Savai'i, but double-check this before driving to Mulifanua Wharf.

Recommended companies:

Blue Pacific Car Hire (☎ 22668; bluepacific@lesamoa.net) Free delivery to all Apia hotels and the airport.

Budget Car Rental (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20561, 22191; www.budget.com; ground fl, NPF Bldg, Beach Rd, Apia)

Funway Rent-A-Car (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22045; www.funwayrentals.ws; Beach Rd, Apia)

Juliana's Car Rentals (Map pp490-1; ☎ 23009; Mata'utu St, Apia)

TAXI

Taxis can be convenient for day-tripping around 'Upolu. You'll pay around ST30 an hour or ST150 for a full day of sightseeing. Always agree on a price with the driver before climbing in.

From Apia, a taxi to the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum costs ST6; to the Bahá'í temple the fare is ST14; to the Manono-uta wharf the fare is ST42; to Mulifanua Wharf the fare is ST45; and to Lalomanu the fare is ST65.

Recommended companies:

City Central Taxis (☎ 23600)

Radio Taxi (☎ 24432)

APIA

pop 44,000

The Samoan capital does not usually attract rave reviews from travellers due to its crowded, noisy and rubbish-ridden environs. But its mixture of colonial architecture, dilapidated modernity and overgrown 'suburbs' does lend it a certain

shabby charm. It's worth pausing here long enough to throw yourself headlong into the town's markets, bars and waterfront hub-bub to experience some authentic Samoan street life.

Apia's highlight is undoubtedly **Palolo Deep Marine Reserve** (Map pp490-1; Vaiala Beach Rd; adult/child ST2/1; ☎ 8am-6pm), a magnificent stretch of shallow reef that features a deep, coral-encrusted hole thronging with marine life. Just offshore you'll also encounter submerged cages crammed with giant clams. The reserve is best visited at high tide; coral scrapes are almost guaranteed at low tide. To reach the drop-off, swim out from the beach to the dark patch of water to the left of the marker stick. Two-hour rentals of snorkels/flippers/masks cost ST2/4/4.

The town's three main marketplaces will satisfy any shopaholic. The main market is **Maketi Fou** (Map pp490-1; Fugalei St), a 24-hour fresh produce bazaar which is almost always jammed with Samoans lugging vegetables, meats and cakes, and devouring ready-made *palusami* (coconut cream wrapped in taro leaves and cooked in banana leaves). Craft hunters will find a treasure trove of goods such as *siapo*, woodcarvings, coconut-shell jewellery, *kirikitti* bats and balls, *lava-lava* and T-shirts. The ambience is somewhat enlivened by the fume-ridden chaos of the adjacent bus station.

Down on the waterfront is Apia's **Flea Market** (Map pp490-1; off Beach Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), a labyrinth of small stalls selling all of the aforementioned craftwork and more. Don't bother to test your bargaining skills here, however, as haggling is not an element of Samoan commerce. Nearby is the **fish market** (Map pp490-1; off Beach Rd; ☎ 7am-2pm), where a scramble takes place every Sunday morning to snag the freshest catches for the postchurch *to'ona'i*.

Nobody seems to be quite sure how many churches there are in Apia and the surrounding area but it's obvious from their prominence that Christianity is big business in Samoa. On Sunday, masses of Apians dress in sparkling white to attend morning church services. Some are conducted in English and visitors are welcome; dress modestly. Looking over the harbour is the white, Madonna-topped **Catholic Cathedral** (Map pp490-1; Beach Rd), built in 1905 and a reliable landmark for sea-weary sailors

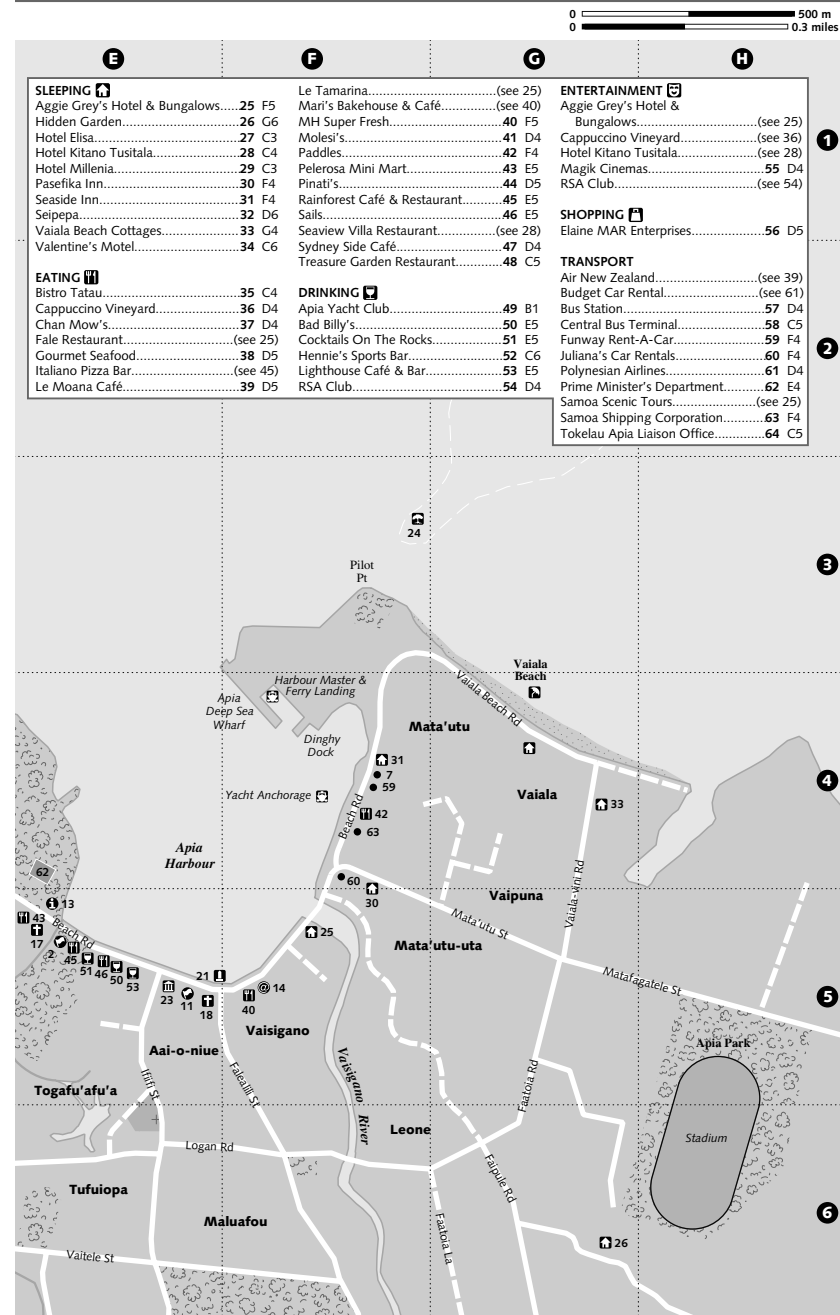
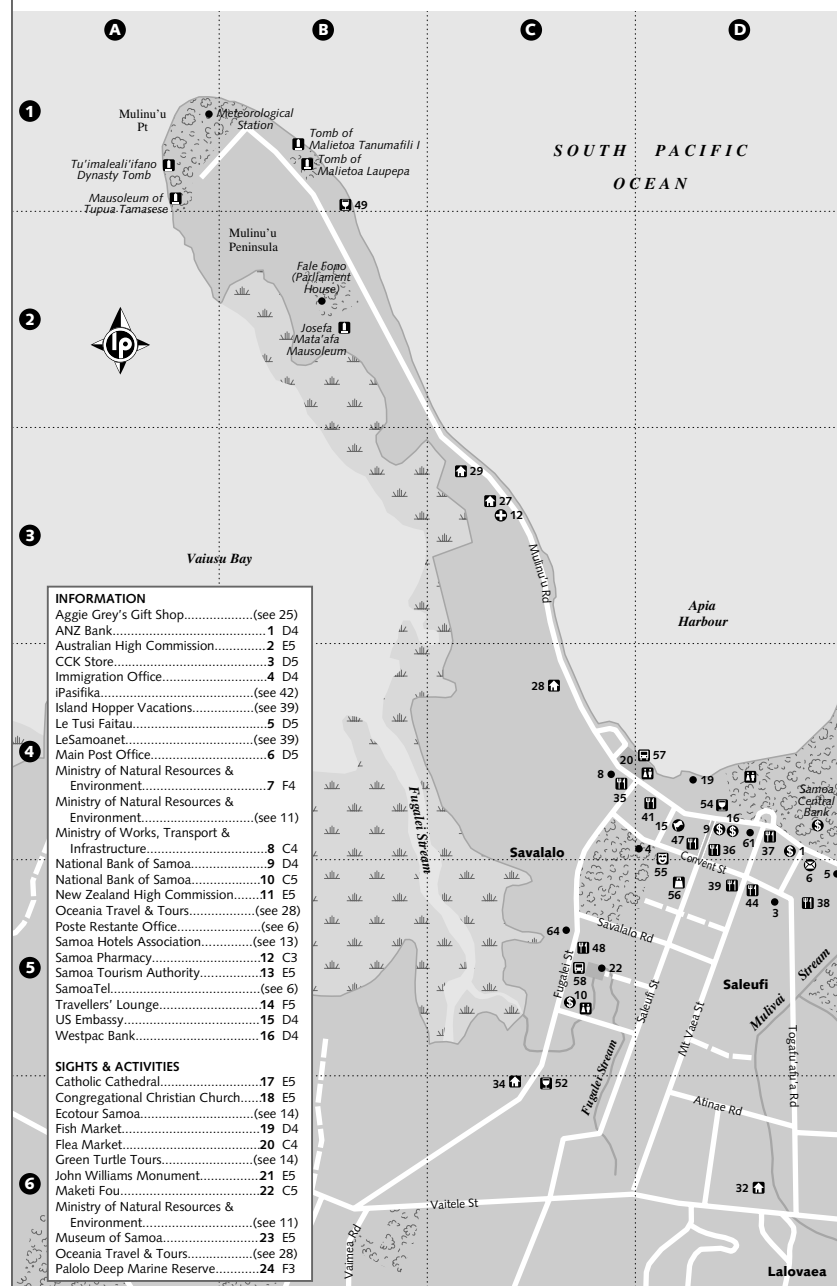
until government and bank offices rose up in front of it. The humble, 1930 **John Williams monument** (Map pp490-1; Beach Rd) sits across the road from the now disused **Congregational Christian Church** (Map pp490-1; cnr Beach Rd & Falealili St), under which the influential reverend's bones are buried.

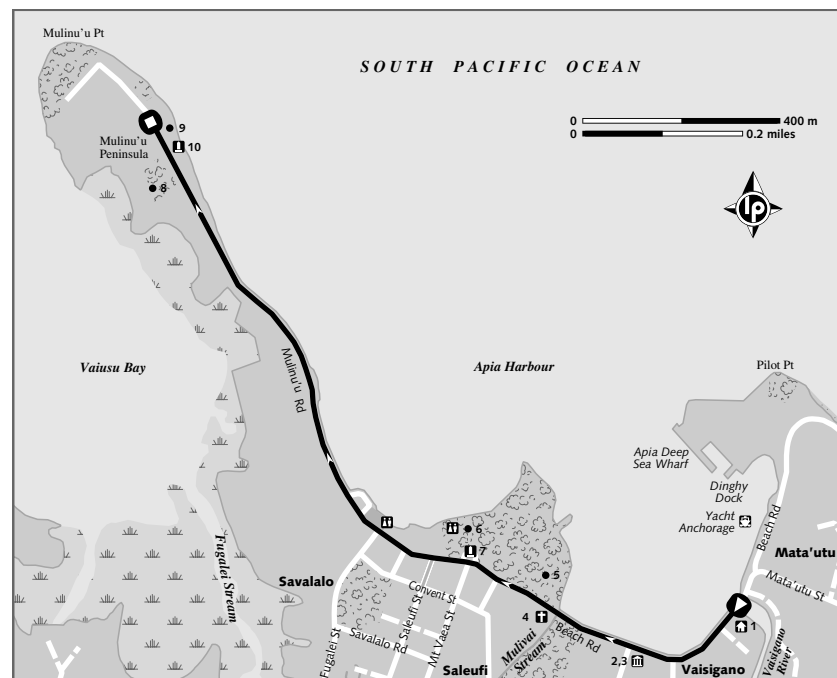
Anyone interested in Samoan history should visit the compact **Museum of Samoa** (Map pp490-1; Beach Rd; admission free; ☎ noon-3.30pm Mon-Fri) to browse its faded photographs, displays on traditional crafts, and items such as carved canoes that bring to life the country's culture. For contemporary art visit the **Madd Gallery** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 28533; Ifiifi St; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri), set up by painter Momoe von Reiche more than 20 years ago to fuel interest in local arts.

Apia Walking Tour

This walking tour (see the map, p492) takes you past structures that reflect both Samoa's past and its present. Start from outside the landmark **Aggie Grey's Hotel** (1; p498), a one-time club founded in 1933 by a woman who became a Pacific celebrity thanks to her starring role in James Michener's novel, *Tales of the South Pacific*. Walk west along Beach Rd to the colonial-style, two-storey **Supreme Court** (2), the upper level of which is home to the **Museum of Samoa** (3; above). Continue further down Beach Rd to gaze up at the recessed statues and twin turrets of the **Catholic Cathedral** (4; left) before heading across the road to check out the seven-storey **government office building** (5) – its universally unpopular design was only slightly improved by the addition of a top-floor *fale*. Nearby is the **Pulenu'u Fale** (6) where *pulenu'u* meet. Further west is a **clock tower** (7) constructed in memory of those who fought and were killed in WWI. Now amble north along the sea wall that buttresses the eastern shore of Mulinu'u Peninsula until you reach the large beehive that is Samoa's parliament house, the **Fale Fono** (8). Close by is the **Lands & Titles Court** (9), the entity that settles land-rights cases. In case you had any doubts about Samoa's Christian leanings, read the **Independence Memorial** (10) in front of the court. It was built to mark the independence of Western Samoa, granted on 1 January 1962, and bears the inscription 'Samoa was founded on God'.

SAMOA





WALK FACTS

Start Aggie Grey's Hotel
Finish Independence Memorial
Distance 3.5km
Duration 1½ hours

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON MUSEUM & MT VAEA SCENIC RESERVE

The **Robert Louis Stevenson Museum** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 20798; The Cross Island Rd; adult/child ST15/5; 🕒 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is set in the Scottish author's beautifully restored former residence, Villa Vailima. Stevenson had the mansion built in 1890 after deciding the tropical climate of 'Upolu might ameliorate his tuberculosis, but he died there a mere four years later. The museum opened in 1994 on the centenary of Stevenson's death.

The estate is an enchanting, mellow place, with a centrepiece lawn and peaceful surrounding gardens that are manicured to look picture-perfect. Villa Vailima is explored on a half-hour tour that takes you from Stevenson's own library and bedroom through

now-quiet rooms filled with imported furniture, antique musical instruments and sepia family photographs.

Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson and his wife Fanny Osborne are buried in the adjacent **Mt Vaea Scenic Reserve** (admission free). To reach the tombs, take the path leading west from the house and turn left at the first trail intersection. After a short climb this path forks: the right-hand trail (30 minutes) entails an extremely steep and slippery climb; the left-hand trail (45 minutes) is less taxing.

A taxi from Apia costs ST6, or take the Vaoola or Siumu bus (ST1.20).

BAHÁ'Í HOUSE OF WORSHIP

While the Bahá'í faith is less than 200 hundred years old, its presence in far-flung corners of the globe technically makes it one of the world's most widespread religions. The attractive **Bahá'í House of Worship** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 24192; 🕒 information centre 6am-6pm) sits in a lovely manicured plot near the highest point of The Cross Island Rd and is one of only eight such structures in

the world – all are architecturally different except for being domed and having nine sides and entrances, reflecting the faith's central tenet of a basic unity of religions and peoples. Attendants in the adjoining information centre will happily answer any questions visitors pester them with.

A taxi from Apia costs around ST14.

LAKE LANOTO'O

The pea-green crater of **Lake Lanoto'o** (Map pp486-7) is about as removed from human habitation as you can get on 'Upolu. Its remote central highlands location and alternating warm and cold currents have lent it an eerie nature which has been further strengthened by some apocryphal rumours. One story has it that the lake bed has never been found, but Lanoto'o's depth was actually determined several years ago (it's apparently not that deep). It's also known as Goldfish Lake as it's full of wild goldfish.

The steep trail leading to the lake from the car park (located 3km along a very rough side road) is overgrown and forks repeatedly. Consequently, a number of hikers have gotten lost trying to find the lake and anyone considering a visit is strongly advised to hire a guide. A dependable outfit is **SamoaOnFoot** (☎ 21529, 25416; samoaonfoot@hotmail.com), which organises half-day trips to the lake (ST55; includes rubber-boot hire).

PAPAPAPAI-TAI FALLS

About 3.5km south of the Bahá'í temple is the parking area for **Papapapai-tai Falls** (Map pp486-7; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Tue-Sat). It's only a few steps to the lookout over this spectacular 100m waterfall that plunges into a dramatic, forested gorge.

FATUMEA POOL

East of Apia, secreted beneath the campus of Piula Methodist Theological College, is **Fatumea Pool** (Map pp486-7; Main East Coast Rd; admission ST2; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Sat), also known as Piula Cave Pool. There are two magical freshwater cave pools here, joined by a 3m underwater passage where you can hum the *Mission Impossible* theme song as you swim through it. Wimps can walk between the caves; the opening to the second cave is about 20m northeast of the first.

UAFATO CONSERVATION AREA

The 14 sq km of wild and rugged terrain that comprises the **Uafato Conservation Area** (Map pp486-7) receives relatively few visitors, even though it boasts untouched rainforest that marches down from 'Upolu's north-eastern hills almost to the ocean's high-tide mark. It's perhaps for this reason that the region remains blanketed by a stillness that seems otherworldly. Flora-lovers can track down a rare stand of *ifilele* (the tree used for carving 'ava bowls), while fauna-lovers can observe numerous bird and bat species going about their aerial business. **Traditional carvers** live in Uafato village and are usually willing to demonstrate their accomplished art to visitors.

Uafato can be reached via a rough track that winds around Fagaloa Bay; the turn-off is at powerful Falefa Falls. This track offers beautiful views through the rainforest down to the sea, but don't go past Saletele without a high-clearance vehicle. Another option is the road (4WD only; 10km) signposted off Le Mafa Pass Rd to the village of Ta'elegaga.

ALEIPATA BEACHES & REEFS

A reef system and associated ecology that remains relatively unscarred by starfish infestations, or destructive human practices such as dynamite fishing, is the reason why the Aleipata district at the southeastern end of 'Upolu offers some of the island's best snorkelling and diving. Familiarise yourself with its submerged beauty by just walking in off the fabulous beach at **Lalomanu** (Map pp486-7), or by venturing offshore to the islands of **Nu'utele**, **Nu'ulua** and **Namu'a** – the first two are part of a conservation area that protects sea-bird nesting grounds – but beware of potentially deadly varieties of cone shells and strong high-tide currents.

Other beaches in the district such as **Saleapaga** (Map pp486-7) aren't quite as inviting as Lalomanu but are still very attractive.

The bus ride from Apia to either Lalomanu (ST4) or A'ufaga (ST4) takes up to 90 minutes.

TO SUA OCEAN TRENCH

While cruising along the Main South Coast Rd, watch out for the partially obscured sign for the superb **To Sua Ocean Trench** (Map

pp486-7; Main South Coast Rd; adult/child ST4/2; (⌚) 8am-5pm). The so-called trench is actually a pair of huge sunken waterholes separated by a short rocky archway, all of it swept by an ocean current that surges in through an underwater passageway. Descend into the second waterhole via the 15m rope ladder and then float around the subground pools to your heart's content. Note, however, that the current can be surprisingly strong, and we strongly advise against attempting to enter the passageway to the ocean.

The serene privacy of the stone-walled trench is perfect for those fit enough to clamber down and (most importantly) back up the high, freely swinging rope ladder. But it will be an ordeal for anyone who doesn't have the strength to haul themselves out and needs to summon help to do so. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the rope ladder is not always in the best condition – report any loose or broken rungs to the land owners.

When you've had your fill of these magical waterholes, take the short track south to ocean cliffs where you can watch large waves flailing against the sheer rocks.

SOPO'AGA FALLS

It's worth stopping to check out **Sopo'aga Falls** (Map pp486-7; Le Mafa Pass Rd; adult/child ST3/free), which empty themselves into an enormous gorge. The lookout over the 54m-high waterfall is accessed through a garden replete with intriguing tropical plants such as Indian mulberry, pineapple and kava. Traditional artefacts are also displayed, including a *umukuka* (cooking house). There's an honesty box for when the attendant's house is unattended.

TOGITOGIGA RECREATION RESERVE

The **Togitogiga Recreation Reserve** (Map pp486-7; (⌚) 6am-6pm) is a pleasant tropical oasis centred on a series of gentle waterfalls. Unless you visit on a Saturday, you'll probably have the sheltered swimming holes between the falls and the picnic grounds above them to yourself. To get here, turn on to the access road for O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park and continue to the second parking area. The toilet facilities have been boarded up so day-trippers should come prepared for wilderness ablutions.

O LE PUPU-PU'E NATIONAL PARK

The 29-sq-km **O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park** (Map pp486-7; (⌚) 6am-6pm), the name of which translates as 'From the Coast to the Mountain Top', was created in 1978. The information building at the park entrance is just a tease – it's been closed for some time – but the on-site ranger usually appears when visitors arrive.

A hiking trail begins opposite the side track to O Le Pupu Lava Coast and leads through thick rainforest to **Pe'ape'a Cave** (Map pp486-7; six hours return), a large lava tube inhabited by *pe'ape'a* (swiftlets). This walk is only recommended for experienced hikers; bring your own (BYO) torch (flashlight). From the cave, you can continue along a heavily overgrown (often obscured) trail to **Ofa Waterfall** (Map pp486-7; three days return for the trip from the main road via the cave). A guide is obligatory. For more info on this trek, visit the resource centre at the **Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 23800; Beach Rd) office beside the NZ High Commission in Apia.

At the park's western boundary, a rough 3.5km **track** ((⌚) 6am-6pm) leads south from the main road to the magnificently rugged **O Le Pupu Lava Coast** (Map pp486-7), where a rocky coastal trail leads you along lava cliffs that are constantly harassed by enormous waves.

SOUTH COAST BEACHES & REEFS

The south coast of 'Upolu hosts numerous beaches where you can play castaway amid leaning coconut palms and surf-lapped sand. At Lefaga village is **Return to Paradise Beach** (Map pp486-7; day access per person/bicycle/car ST2/3/10; (⌚) Mon-Sat), which had a starring role in the 1951 Gary Cooper film *Return to Paradise*. This particular paradise is a little rough on swimmers, however, due to submerged boulders and heavy surf. From here a narrow road lined by dozing villages and with great views heads west to Falelatai.

Down a 3km access road east of Return to Paradise Beach is **Matareva** (Map pp486-7; day access per person/bicycle/car ST2/3/10), a series of delightful coves with shallow snorkelling areas and lots of rock pools. A few kilometres east of Matareva is beautiful **Salamumu Beach** (Map pp486-7; day access per bicycle/car ST3/6; (⌚) Mon-Sat), reached via a potholed 5.5km track.

About 15km further east is **Aganoa Black Sand Beach** (Map pp486-7; day access per car ST5), where the water is deep enough for swimming. There's also a popular surf-break called **Boulders** (Map pp486-7) just off Cape Niutau'i. The turn-off to the very rough 3km track to Aganoa is opposite a blue house 150m east of the one-lane stone bridge in Sa'agafou. The beach is a 10-minute walk to the east of where this track terminates; locals told us to just ignore the 'Private Property' sign.

Accessed from the village of Tafatafa to the east of O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park is **Vaiula Beach** (Map pp486-7), which has a good surf-break.

PAPASEE'A SLIDING ROCK

Kids and adults alike have a great time skimming down the waterfall into a cool rock pool at **Papase'e'a Sliding Rock** (Map pp486-7; off Maugafolau Rd; adult/child ST2/1; (⌚) 6am-6pm). Competition for a seat at the top of the main 5m slide can be fierce, but there are also three smaller slides to enjoy. If you visit during the dry season, check that the water level in the pool is deep enough to be safe. The path down to the pool comprises a steep, slippery, 200-step stairway, so save some energy for the climb back up.

Take the Se'ese'e bus (ST1.30) from the Maketi Fou and ask to be dropped off at the turn-off for Papase'e'a.

MANONO

pop 1400 / area 3 sq km

If you'd like to temporarily escape the engine noise and boom-box soundscape created by Samoan buses and cars, as well as forego encounters with fractious village dogs, boat over to the small island of Manono in Apolima Strait. The only transport option here is the humble foot, and canines appear to have been banished, which makes Manono a truly tranquil destination. The only things that can snap you out of a tropical reverie here are occasional blasts from local stereos and the hotel tour groups that can clog the island's main trail.

It's obligatory for visitors to do the two- to 2½-hour circumnavigation of the island by following a narrow trail edged with distinctive yellow *lantalotalo* (local variety of lily), banana palms and hibiscus. Handicrafts such as *lava-lava* and woven baskets are

sometimes hawked along this path by village women. The trail winds through Lepuia'i, where you'll see the two-tiered **Grave of 99 Stones** (Map pp486-7). It's dedicated to high chief Vaovasa, who was killed after an unsuccessful attempt to abduct his 100th wife from 'Upolu. The **Peter Turner monument** (Map pp486-7) at Faleu commemorates the 1835 landing of the Methodist missionary.

If you follow the path behind the women's committee building in Salua, you'll eventually end up on top of Mt Tulimanuiva (110m) where there's a large **star mound**. Nearby is the **grave of Afutiti**, who was buried standing up to keep watch over the island. This side trip takes 90 minutes to two hours.

Guided tours of Manono (ST20) and various other activities, from canoe trips to instruction in traditional weaving and cooking, are offered by both of the island's places to stay (see p500).

To visit Manono, head for the jetty at Cape Fatuosofia, just south of Samoan Village Resorts. To charter a boat for a return day trip should cost ST40 for the entire boat. Buses marked either 'Manono-uta' or 'Falelatai' (ST2) will take you to the jetty from Apia. A taxi costs ST42.

APOLIMA

pop 100 / area 1 sq km

Few travellers make the trip out to minuscule Apolima in Apolima Strait, which means few outsiders get to appreciate the island's fantastic isolation and rugged beauty. From a distance, Apolima looks like a steep-sided, inaccessible volcanic cone adrift in the Pacific. It's only when you get close enough that you spy the narrow gap in the island's northern cliffs, through which small boats are driven right up onto a narrow sandy beach. Only 100 people live in Apolima's compact crater, where a handful of buildings are interspersed with pig pens, jungle foliage and (naturally) a volleyball court. One of the largest timber-roofed structures is Apolima's church, where a mellifluous **choir** practices on Saturday night before singing with even more harmonious conviction during Sunday morning **church services**; dress up for the occasion. To get a wonderful overview of the island and surrounding ocean, climb up to the small **lighthouse** perched high on the crater's northern rim.

An invitation is necessary to visit Apolima. Drop into the shop in Apolima-uta with the Western Union sign out front and ask to speak to Sofia. She may contact an islander on your behalf to arrange a visit. Boats depart from the wharf behind this shop. Accommodation providers on nearby Manono (see p500) may also be able to arrange a visit.

Accommodation and food should cost around ST50 per person per night. It's also much appreciated if you gift some food to the host family (about ST20 worth of chicken is a reliable choice). Confirm that the cost of the return boat trip is included in the agreed price. If a boat has to be organised expressly for you (such as on Sunday, when Apolima's boats are beached) it will cost ST150 for a one-way trip.

ACTIVITIES

Aficionados of snorkelling and diving will find plenty of spectacular underwater territory to explore around 'Upolu, while experienced surfers and kayakers have a challenging time on surface swells. Land lubbers are kept happy by some stunning inland trails; the less energetic content themselves with a round of golf.

Diving

Moanalei Dive 'n' Surf (Map pp486-7; ☎ 777 7216), based at Taufua Beach Fales (see p499), in the Aleipata district, conducts diving trips (from ST195) along 'Upolu's southeastern coast.

Liquid Motion (Map pp486-7; ☎ 64381; www.liquidmotion.ws), based at Sinalai Reef Resort (p499), does various south-coast dives (ST150 for one dive, ST120 for each of one to five dives) and offers five-day Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) courses (ST1200). Also try **AquaSamoa** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 23805; www.aquasamoa.com), based at Cocoanuts Beach Club & Resort at Maninoa, on the island's south coast.

Golf

The **Royal Samoa Country Club** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 20120; off Main East Coast Rd) has an 18-hole, par 72 course. Visitors are welcome and pay ST10/20 to play nine/18 holes. Club hire is ST20 (with a ST50 deposit).

There's also the **Faleata Golf Course** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 23964), a few kilometres south of Vaitele. To play nine/18 holes costs ST5/8.

Only half-sets of clubs are available for hire (ST10).

Hiking

SamoaOnFoot (☎ 21529, 25416; samoaonfoot@hotmail.com) offers expert guided hikes through some of 'Upolu's most rewarding terrain. Options include a 15km guided walk (ST90) around Fagaloa Bay and an excursion to mysterious Lake Lanoto'o (p493).

Other rewarding places for a walk are the coastal and rainforest trails in O Le Pupupu'e National Park (p494) and the short but rather taxing walk to see the graves of Robert Louis and Fanny Stevenson near the summit of Mt Vaea (p492).

Kayaking

EcoTour Samoa (☎ 22144; www.ecotoursamoa.com) offers a seven-day sea-kayaking tour (US\$190 per person per day) where you'll see coral reefs just 4.5m below you, chat with local fishers in their *paopao* (canoes) and spot dolphins.

Island Explorer Sea Kayaking (☎ 22401; www.islandexplorer.ws) caters to everyone from beginners to experienced paddlers. Day trips cost ST180 per person, while overnight two-day tours to Manono or the offshore islands at Aleipata are ST360 (plus an extra ST50 to ST70 for accommodation and meals).

Snorkelling & Swimming

The snorkelling off 'Upolu is superb, particularly the Aleipata district (p493), around Manono (p495) and at Palolo Deep (p489). If you plan to do a lot of snorkelling, bring your own gear as few places hire snorkels, masks and flippers, and the equipment supplied by some accommodation providers is usually not in great condition.

The majority of beaches around the island are too shallow for satisfying swimming, but you won't hear anyone complaining.

Surfing

Surfers should take their boards to the break off Vaiala Beach, which lies immediately east of Tafatafa village. Experienced board riders can also go day surfing at Salani Surf Resort (p499); the ST150 fee covers guided surfing and a buffet lunch.

Moanalei Dive 'n' Surf (☎ 777 7216), based at Taufua Beach Fales (p499), organises guided surfing trips (from ST50).

'UPOLU FOR CHILDREN

There are lots of entertaining distractions for children in 'Upolu. A handful of these are located indoors, such as the cultural knick-knacks in Apia's Maketi Fou (p489) and its Flea Market (p489), the absorbing history of the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum (p492) and exuberant Samoan *fiafia* (p503). But the majority lie out in Samoa's fresh tropical air. Treat the kids to safe snorkelling at Palolo Deep (p489) and off Lalomanu Beach (p493), the exhilarating plunge at Papasee's Sliding Rock (p495), or a picnic at the Togitogiga Recreation Reserve (p494).

Unfortunately, professional baby-sitting is not a growth industry in Samoa. Ask your accommodation provider about child-minding options.

TOURS

The following Apia-based companies conduct tours of 'Upolu:

Ecotour Samoa (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22144; www.ecotoursamoa.com; Travellers' Lounge, Beach Rd) Its all-inclusive ecotours give participants the chance to indulge in 4WD excursions, bird-watching and sea kayaking. Most tours cost US\$190 per person per day.

Green Turtle Tours (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22144, 29229; www.greenturtletoours.com; Travellers' Lounge, Beach Rd) This outfit's guide-accompanied hop-on, hop-off bus services conveniently circle 'Upolu daily. But its attempts to get you to prebook with its favoured accommodation doesn't work in favour of travellers seeking true flexibility, and budget travellers can easily find better deals than its ST90 per night accommodation vouchers. A one-month pass costs ST170, not including accommodation and many daily activities. It also offers day tours of 'Upolu (ST90).

Oceania Travel & Tours (Map pp490-1; ☎ 24443; www.oceania-travel.com; Hotel Kitano Tuisitila, Mulinu'u Rd) Among Oceania's day tours is one taking in eastern 'Upolu (US\$40), including Lalomanu and Fatumea Pool, and one of Manono (US\$40).

Samoa Scenic Tours (Map pp490-1; ☎ 26981, 22880; www.samoascenicstours.com; Aggie Grey's Hotel, Beach Rd) Runs half-/full-day scenic, cultural and ecotours around Apia and 'Upolu costing from ST60/120 per person.

SLEEPING

There are abundant accommodation options in and around central Apia to suit all budgets. If you're looking for something less urban and more beachy, the island's south coast is strewn with all manner of *fale* and other, fancier bedrooms; much of this

southern beachside accommodation lies in the Aleipata district. There are also several great places to stay on the north coast (east of Apia).

Apia

BUDGET

Hidden Garden (Map pp490-1; ☎ 25416, 31252; gar.denvi@lesamoa.net; Vini Rd; fale per person ST35-45) This budget setup is extremely popular with travellers because its languid environs are well removed from the congestion of central Apia, and because its stilt-raised *fale* are scattered haphazardly across an appealingly overgrown plot of land. The owner, Eti, conducts hikes throughout Samoa via SamoaOnFoot (opposite).

Seipepa (Map pp490-1; ☎ 25447; seipepa@samoa-experience.com; off Vaitele St; dm/s/d incl breakfast ST45/75/90; ☑) This lovely place is ensconced in one of the peaceful villages that make up the outer 'suburbs' of Apia. The quartet of rooms in the main house are highly sought after as they offer more privacy than the tight grouping of *fale* in the backyard. Kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared.

Valentine's Motel (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22158; valentine@samoa.ws; Fugalei St; s/d from ST40/60; ☑ ☑ ☑) This friendly place has the feel of a big family home, a perception reinforced by the prominent tomb of a family member out on the back lawn. When you want a break from the confines of the budget rooms, head downstairs to sprawl in the spacious lounge. Air-conditioned rooms with bathrooms are available for ST100.

Seaside Inn (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22578; seasideinn@ipasifika.net; Beach Rd; dm ST30, s ST65-70, d ST75-85) The laid-back Seaside Inn has an unpredictable mixture of rooms: some are a little worn out and claustrophobic, while others seem to be in much better condition. Check out the rooms on offer before committing to an overnight stay. The convivial café-bar out front serves cheap fast food and is a gathering place for thirsty travellers.

MIDRANGE

Aniva's Place (Map pp486-7; ☎ 23431, 20501; anivas@lesamoa.net; off Falealili St, Moto'otua; s ST95-115, d ST115-135; ☑ ☑ ☑) This two-storey 'suburban' dwelling offers all the creature comforts of someone else's home, as well as a small bar, a refreshing pool and a personable character that is lacking in most of Apia's

other places to stay. It's a fair way from the town centre, but Aniva's relaxing air is well worth the extra travel time. Prices include breakfast.

Pasefika Inn (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20971; www.pasefika.inn.ws; Mata'utu St; r incl breakfast from ST90; ☎ ☎) Rooms at the Pasefika are great value for money. They're generally in very good condition and have a bathroom, telephone and a fridge to stock refreshments. The inn has a casual, airy feel enhanced by the balcony wrapped around the front and a spacious dining-bar area where guests gobble the complimentary breakfast.

Samoan Outrigger Hotel (Map pp486-7; ☎ 20042; outrigger@samoa.ws; Falealili St; fale per person ST45, s ST100-140, d ST110-160; ☎ ☎ ☎) This charming hotel is set in a high-ceilinged, century-old timber building hidden away behind a high hedge. Upmarket sophistication is implied by the billiard table, swimming pool and the calm authority of the staff, but the price tag is resolutely midrange. For something a bit different, rent one of the *fale* out back.

Vaiala Beach Cottages (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22202; www.samoana.org/vaiala; Vaiala-vini Rd; s/d/tr US\$45/70/80; ☎ ☎) This grouping of modern, self-contained cottages is only a short stroll from the soothing blue of the South Pacific Ocean, including the beautiful depths of Palolo Deep. It's an ideal base for families keen to exploit the lower rates offered for longer stays, though it's not the quietest place in Apia when full up.

Hotel Millenia (Map pp490-1; ☎ 28284; www.hotelmilleniasamoa.com; Mulinu'u Rd; r incl breakfast from ST180; ☎ ☎) This large hotel is perched halfway up breezy Mulinu'u Peninsula, where there's relatively little traffic noise to disturb the seaside ambience. Rooms are well appointed and come with breakfast, while the upstairs sitting room is perfect for lounging with a book in one hand and a cocktail in another.

TOP END

Hotel Kitano Tusitala (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21122; www.kitano.ws; Mulinu'u Rd; s US\$95-175, d US\$105-180, tr US\$125-195; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Kitano Tusitala thumbed its nose at the noisiness of central Apia and chose instead to site itself on an attractive, landscaped 5.5-hectare plot at the base of Mulinu'u Peninsula. When not lazing around the pool or snoozing in the

spacious air-conditioned rooms, guests are indulging in the fine dining at the Seaview Villa Restaurant (p501).

Aggie Grey's Hotel & Bungalows (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; www.aggiegreys.com; Beach Rd; s US\$120-170, d & tw US\$125-175, st US\$280-340; ☎ ☎ ☎) This four-star hotel is a Samoan icon thanks to James Michener's immortalisation of its namesake owner in one of his books. It's certainly luxurious, with most rooms and bungalows (named after various celebrities) arranged around an attractive central pool; some good eateries, including the Fale Restaurant (see p502); a popular *fiafia* (see p503); and excellent facilities, from Internet access to organised tours. Poolside rooms are, however, disappointingly poky considering their price – get a harbour-facing room instead.

Hotel Elisa (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21116; www.hotel.elisa.ws; Mulinu'u Rd; r ST290-320, st ST750; ☎ ☎ ☎) The east-facing rooms at Hotel Elisa offer ocean vistas, while west-facing rooms point you towards the island's steep central ridge. The views and the hotel's soporific location on Mulinu'u Peninsula help make up for its rather functional design aesthetic.

Northeastern 'Upolu

Albatross Hideout (Map pp486-7; ☎ 40375; Saoluafata; fale per person ST30, r ST70) The excellent, table-equipped *fale* here extend out over the waters of a shallow bay, so you can update your travel diary or munch one of the tasty meals served up in the on-site restaurant (breakfast ST10, lunch and dinner ST18 to ST45; open lunch and dinner Monday to Saturday) while listening to water lapping underneath you. Look for the roadside sign reading 'Dal Mart' on its top half.

Silirosa Beach Huts (Map pp486-7; ☎ 40656; Laulū'i; r per person ST30) This budget place comprises jerry-built beachfront huts that look as if a strong wind could sweep them away; fortunately they're more resilient than they look. The handmade nature of the accommodation, the requirement for self-catering (a wood stove is supplied) and the overgrown surrounds will suit backpackers looking for a truly down-to-earth experience.

Aleipata District

Litia Sini's Beach Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 41050, 41388; www.litiasinibeach.ws; Main South Coast Rd, Lalomanu; fale per person incl breakfast & dinner ST70; ☎) The

enclosed *fale* at this highly recommended accommodation are lined up along the gorgeous sands of Lalomanu Beach. From their small raised decks, it's only a short dash into Aleipata's turquoise lagoon; snorkel gear is available for hire (ST15, ST50 deposit). Breakfast and dinner are included in the price, and a windswept on-site restaurant (meals ST12 to ST20) provides basic lunches. The resort also has a bar with an outside deck overlooking the beach.

Namu'a Island Beach Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 20566; namuaisland@hotmail.com; Namu'a; fale per person incl meals ST70) Namu'a is only a short boat ride from Mutiatele (cars minded for ST10), but once you're on this tiny, family-owned island you'll feel like 'Upolu is light years away. Do an early morning circumnavigation of the shoreline, clamber up the steep central peak and snorkel the surrounding reef. Ask for a west-facing *fale*, as those facing north bear the brunt of incoming wind. Prices include all meals; BYO favourite liquids.

Taufua Beach Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 41051; Main South Coast Rd, Lalomanu; fale per person incl breakfast & dinner ST55-60) Taufua is set up beside Litia Sini's on Lalomanu Beach and draws praise from travellers who appreciate its lovely setting and gregarious nature. Choose between enclosed and open *fale*.

Faofao Beach Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 41067; Main South Coast Rd, Saleapaga; fale per person ST20) Faofao treats each guest like one of the family. Meal-times often feel more like social events, and the Saturday night *fiafia* (guests/nonguests free/ST30) is just one cause for celebration. There's a separate charge for meals (breakfast ST10, lunch ST15 and dinner ST15) but when you tote it all up it's still a reasonable collective rate for food and a thatched roof over your head.

Boomerang Creek Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 40358; www.boomerangcreek.ws; Main South Coast Rd, Saleapaga; fale s ST25-50, d ST40-75) The name is a tribute to Australia, but the beachfront setting with a backdrop of greenery-cloaked cliffs is pure Samoa. *Fale* up on the hillside terraces are cheaper (and feel more private) than those anchored on the beach. Vegetarians will be pleased to find several options on the menu of the Kangarama Restaurant (meals ST10 to ST40; open breakfast, lunch and dinner). This low-key resort also offers snorkel hire (ST5), Samoan massages (ST20) and a Saturday night *fiafia* (ST10/30 without/with food).

Southern 'Upolu

Salani Surf Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 41069; www.surf.samoa.com; Salani; surfer package ST350, nonsurfer package ST275, B&B d ST150; ☎ ☎) This excellent resort at the mouth of the Fupisia River caters primarily to experienced surfers and emphasises respect for Samoan culture. Numbers are limited to a maximum of 12 at any one time and the main package includes transfers, accommodation (in enclosed *fale*), meals, tours and guided surfing; nonsurfer packages include accommodation and meals only.

Sinalei Reef Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 25191; www.sinalei.com; off Main South Coast Rd; r US\$190-600; ☎ ☎ ☎) This resort occupies a large, nicely landscaped plot by the ocean. Squeezed in between the well-appointed, stand-alone units are tennis courts, a swimming pool and a restaurant (lunch ST18 to ST30, dinner ST25 to ST50; open lunch and dinner; nonsmoking) with an eclectic menu of seafood paella, Thai curries and pizzas; nonguests are also welcome to eat here. Establish where your unit is sited, as those opposite the resort's golf course are not as appealing locationwise as those near the pool. There's a Wednesday night *fiafia* (ST65 for dinner and show).

Vava'u Beach Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 41306; Vava'u; fale ST180, each extra adult/child ST20/10; ☎) You'll find these upmarket *fale* well off the main coast road on peaceful Vava'u Beach. *Fale* at the property's western end have ready access to the most desirable slice of beach. After a swim, try some authentic *oka* (marinated raw fish) in the on-site restaurant (mains ST14 to ST28; open breakfast, lunch and dinner).

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Virgin Cove Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 777 5000; Sa'anapu; fale per person ST70-90) Turn right once you reach the beach at Sa'anapu to find this superb, purpose-built resort. Its waterfront setting is magnificent – a beautiful strip of sand bordering a gentle cove – and its environmentally friendly facilities ensure minimal impact on the surrounding nature. The large *fale* at the cove's western end offer more privacy than those nearest the car park. Prices include breakfast and dinner; vegetarians are catered for with advance notice.

Tautua & Sauaso Hunt's Fale (Map pp486-7; ☎ 778 3186, 779 6056; Aganoa Black Sand Beach; fale per person incl meals ST60) At the time of research there was only one *fale* at this secluded, family-run place, with more rumoured to be on the way. The *fale* has a couple of beds and a mattress. Aganoa is one of the few beaches in Samoa where the water is deep enough for a satisfying swim.

Matavea Beach Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 35139; Matavea Beach; fale per person ST40, with all meals ST70) The water off Matavea Beach is a beautiful turquoise colour and numerous rock pools line a serene swimming area, so it's a great spot to overnight. These attributes also make the beach very popular with locals.

Northwestern 'Upolu

Aggie Grey's Lagoon & Beach Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 22880; www.aggiegreys.com; Main West Coast Rd; s/d/st US\$180/190/400; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This sibling property to the Aggie Grey hotel in Apia opened to great fanfare in 2005, even though the resort was still being landscaped and more rooms were being added. The facilities are what you'd expect from a five-star property and the location near the airport will suit those with early morning or late evening flight times. Book well in advance of your visit.

Airport Lodge (Map pp486-7; ☎ 45584; www.samoahotels.ws/airportlodge.htm; Main West Coast Rd; s ST110-140, d ST125-170; ☎ ☎) The bathroom-equipped bungalows at Airport Lodge are light, breezy affairs, but are otherwise undistinguished. This accommodation will suit those who want to stay relatively near the airport or Mulifanua Wharf (for boats to Savai'i). Breakfast costs an extra ST18, while a set-menu dinner costs ST35.

Manono

Sunset View Fales (Map pp486-7; ☎ 45640; Lepuia'i; fale per person ST90) Rustic but bright and comfortable little beach shacks are on offer here in Lepuia'i village. The owner, Leota, provides lessons in traditional Samoan cookery and will run you out to the nearby reef for snorkelling stints. Price includes all meals and boat transfers.

Vaotu'ua Beach Resort (Map pp486-7; ☎ 46077; Faleu; fale per person ST45, with all meals ST90) Vaotu'ua is located in Faleu village on the eastern shore of Manono. As resorts go, this is a low-key affair comprising a small, shady

compound with a half-dozen simple *fale*. Meals are eaten at a communal table and can each be purchased separately for ST15. Boat transfers are included in the price. There's a well-stocked shop opposite the resort.

EATING

Café society types will only find a few places in Apia that meet their expectations. Visitors generally make do choosing between formal restaurants in high-profile hotels and along Apia's waterfront, informal cafés where fried foods rule, and the several places devoted to international cuisines.

The places reviewed here are all located in Apia. Outside of the Samoan capital, only a handful of accommodation offers menu-based restaurants; most places to stay, particularly those involving *fale*, include at least some meals in the price of an overnight stay. Details of all such arrangements are given in the reviews of the preceding Sleeping section.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Sydney Side Café (Map pp490-1; ☎ 779 0495; Gold Star Bldg, Convent St; meals ST10-22; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) If the strength and quality of your morning coffee are essential to how you cope with the rest of your day, head down to this café for a wake-up call. While enjoying the taste of imported beans, you can also enjoy some excellent gourmet sandwiches and salads.

Gourmet Seafood (Map pp490-1; ☎ 24625; Togafu'afu'a Rd; meals ST5-8; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This place is a bit of a local institution and is favoured by Samoans and expats alike for its no-frills but tasty seafood meals. The open-air eating area is usually

packed with customers at lunchtime, discussing their day between mouthfuls of burgers and assorted fish food.

Cappuccino Vineyard (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22049; ACB Bldg; meals ST7-16; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Set up at one end of a busy pedestrian mall, Cappuccino Vineyard does a busy trade in filling breakfasts and lunches before transforming its compact floor space into a night-time wine bar (see p502). The good food is augmented by decent coffee and smoothies.

Curry House (Map pp486-7; ☎ 26815; The Cross Island Rd; meals ST4-20; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) On the way to or from the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum, drop by this small, pleasant eatery for some delicious Indian fare. Its deck offers long-range views and is a nice place on which to spoon-feed yourself some curry and slurp a lassi or two. All the food is available for takeaway.

Le Moana Café (Map pp490-1; ☎ 24828; Lotemau Centre, cnr Convent & Mt Vaea Sts; meals ST7-18; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Le Moana is another breakfast- and lunchtime favourite of Apian workers, who crowd its small interior and courtyard to devour pancakes, burgers and steaks. Every Wednesday night it dusts off a Weber and cooks up an all-you-can-eat barbecue (ST37), accompanied by live music.

Pinati's (Map pp490-1; ☎ 24248; Convent St; mains ST2-5; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Pinati's is one of the few remaining places in town selling cheap Samoan nosh. It's a cavernous, unsigned eatery that's always full of Samoan workers and it serves up huge meals.

Mari's Bakehouse & Café (Map pp490-1; ☎ 30658; Beach Rd; meals ST12-19; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Mari's can plug the empty spaces in any stomach, no matter how big they are. Just don't overeat when sampling the hearty burritos, burgers and egg dishes, or you'll find that you'll spend the rest of the day regretting it (trust us).

Restaurants

Sails (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20628; Beach Rd; breakfast & lunch ST15-25, dinner ST30-45; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The broad balcony of this accomplished restaurant, set in a historic building, is the perfect place to enjoy a big breakfast while watching the Police Band march by early on weekday mornings. Alternatively, come here for dinner

and watch the sun sink into the harbour. The excellent menu will delight seafood-lovers, but vegetarians may feel cheated by having to make a special request for their preferred meal.

Bistro Tatau (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22727; Beach Rd; mains ST25-50; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This classy fine-dining establishment is sited across the road from the Flea Market, as if in counterpoint to the latter's greasy food stalls. You'd be hard-pressed to find another menu as innovative as Tatau's in Samoa – the local appetite for soufflés, laksa and vegetable crepes just isn't that great. The interior is crisp chic, all polished floorboards and white tablecloths.

Seaview Villa Restaurant (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21122; Hotel Kitano Tusitala, Mulinu'u Rd; mains ST30-45; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This well-established restaurant in the grounds of the Hotel Kitano Tusitala is touted as one of country's best. Its reputation is staked on a variety of expertly prepared Japanese dishes and superfresh seafood, no doubt collected from the nearby fish market while most people are still asleep. It's located upstairs in a building adjacent to the hotel's access road. Book well ahead to nab a table on the sea-facing balcony.

Paddles (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20194; Beach Rd; mains ST16-38; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Though considered by many as simply a good place for a late-afternoon drink, Paddles also prepares some tempting main meals, from seafood crepes to creamy pastas. Turn up early on weekend nights if you want a table on the balcony overlooking the harbour.

Treasure Garden Restaurant (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22586; Fugalei St; mains ST13-30; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Occupying the ground floor of the Treasure Garden Hotel, this restaurant has an enormous menu of Chinese dishes – you'd need several weeks to try them all. Meals are competently prepared and the chef doesn't skimp on the servings. There are about a dozen vegetarian selections.

Rainforest Café & Restaurant (Map pp490-1; ☎ 25736; Beach Rd; lunch ST8-16, dinner ST14-26; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This BYO eatery couldn't find much backwoods flora on Beach Rd, so it provided its own. The interior walls are screened by a myriad plants, and wood shavings crunch under the feet of guests. Curries and other hearty meals are the specialties here, and vegetarians are catered for.

Also recommended:

Fale Restaurant (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; Aggie Grey's Hotel, Beach Rd; breakfast & lunch from ST15, dinner from ST19; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) This informal restaurant sits within an enormous *fale* beside Aggie Grey's pool and serves up lots of Western-style meals.

Le Tamarina (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; lunch/dinner from ST35/50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon; ☎) Also in Aggie Grey's, off the foyer, is this stiffly formal place.

Self-Catering

There's an abundance of fresh produce at the **Maketi Fou** (p489) and the **fish market** (p489). Central supermarkets with reasonable selections include **Chan Mow's** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22616; Beach Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm), **Molesi's** (Map pp490-1; Beach Rd; ☎ 6am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) and **MH Super Fresh** (Map pp490-1; Beach Rd; ☎ 6am-7pm), while the ramshackle **Pelerosa Mini Mart** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 26042; Beach Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) has a bakery selling bread, pies and doughnuts.

DRINKING

Apia's waterfront is crammed with drinking options, though few open their doors on a Sunday. Elsewhere on 'Upolu, the only commercial establishments where you can slake your thirst are the bars at hotels and resorts.

Cocktails on the Rocks (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20736; Beach Rd, Apia) For some reason, this small, unassuming bar is almost always full. It's a favourite haunt of expats and newly arrived *palagi*, who crowd around the tables out front and send up clouds of smoke while ordering cocktail refills (ST8/20 per glass/jug).

RSA Club (Returned Services Association; Map pp490-1; ☎ 20171; Beach Rd, Apia) Don't be fooled by the billboard advertising Wondersoft toilet paper at the entrance. Nicknamed 'The Rosa', this place is anything but soft: the

standard drink is a 750mL Vailima beer, the floor has possibly the oldest, most scarred linoleum on the planet, and you don't want to be here when a fight breaks out (usually around the pool tables at closing time). The atmosphere is always lively, especially when bands play (see opposite).

Apia Yacht Club (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21313; Mulinu'u Rd, Apia; ☎ 4pm-midnight Tue-Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) It's worth heading up Mulinu'u Peninsula for a drink at this laid-back yacht club. The sea views merely reinforce the relaxing effects of a cold Vailima, and it's also one of the few places in town that's open on a Sunday.

Bad Billy's (Map pp490-1; ☎ 30298; Beach Rd, Apia) Billy's really isn't that bad. Things can sometimes get a little out of hand in this raucous saloon-style bar, but it's mostly just a lively place for a drink and a game of pool – that's assuming you can win a table off one of the local lads.

Lighthouse Café & Bar (Map pp490-1; ☎ 26669; Beach Rd, Apia; admission Mon & Tue nights free, Wed-Sat nights ST5; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) This enormous venue is mostly devoted to pool players early in the evening, but really fires up when guest DJs take their place at the turntable. A breeze occasionally blows in from the harbour across the road to cool sweaty bodies.

Sieni's 3-Stool Bar & Restaurant (Map pp486-7; ☎ 24849; Coconuts Beach Club & Resort, Maninua) This affable bar is situated in Coconuts Beach Club & Resort on 'Upolu's southern coast, close to where The Cross Island Rd terminates. Contrary to its name, there's plenty of seating up at the hefty wooden bar, though some of it may be taken up by the resident cat.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nondrinkers and those who don't want to spend their entire 'Upolu visit slumped over an empty glass will find alternative entertainment in the form of live music, traditional dances and movies.

Live Music

Cappuccino Vineyard (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22049; ACB Bldg, Apia) Several evenings a week, this casual café spreads its tables across a pedestrian mall and provides Samoan musicians to serenade wine- and beer-sipping patrons. It's a great way to end another busy day in the tropics.

RSA Club (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20171; Beach Rd, Apia) Samoan bands regularly brave the large stage at the Rosa. Gigs are often free but occasionally there's a cover charge (around ST4 to ST5), particularly if two bands are playing on the same night.

Fiafia

Spectacular Samoan dance performances called *fiafia* are staged regularly at various hotels. They're popular so it's best to book ahead. A buffet dinner usually accompanies the show, though you can choose to see the show only. There's a *fiafia* at **Aggie Grey's Hotel & Bungalows** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; Beach Rd, Apia; show ST15, dinner & show ST55) every Wednesday night and an equally lavish production at **Aggie Grey's Lagoon & Beach Resort** (Map pp486-7; ☎ 22880; Main West Coast Rd; show ST15, dinner & show ST55) every Thursday. The **Hotel Kitano Tusitala** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21122; Mulinu'u Rd, Apia; show ST15, dinner & show ST50) has a *fiafia* on Friday night.

Cinemas

Magik Cinemas (Map pp490-1; ☎ 28126; Convent St, Apia; adult/child ST5/3.50) The pair of theatres here is devoted to mainstream movie magik and gets insanely busy on the weekend of a first release.

SHOPPING

Memorable souvenirs can be bought at various shops around Apia, including *siapo*, the intricate *ie toga*, and finely made, multilegged *'ava* bowls. A treasure trove of such

crafts is available from the Maketi Fou (p489) and the Flea Market (p489).

Elaine MAR Enterprises (Map pp490-1; ☎ 25891; Saleufi St, Apia) Here you can buy colourful *lava-lava* machine-printed with traditional designs for ST9, or else have one made up for you – the hand-printed material costs around ST10 per metre.

Plantation House (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22839; Lotopa Rd, Apia) Beautiful Samoan-made *lava-lava*, prints, tailored shirts, jewellery, lacquerware and other crafts line the walls of this fine boutique, which is situated on the southern outskirts of Apia.

SAVAI'I

pop 42,824 / area 1700 sq km

Savai'i is 'Upolu's wilder relative, a spectacular combination of overgrown plantations, lush jungle, sea-smashed coastal cliffs, pristine waterfalls and ragged volcanic cones (around 450 of them). The volcanic nature of the largest island in Polynesia outside NZ and Hawai'i has resulted in some gargantuan lava overflows in Savai'i's northern reaches. The island also has a prominent role in Samoan mythology and its rough landscape yields numerous legendary formations and enigmatic archaeological sites. Scattered around the coastline are typical Samoan villages, where children sit atop the tombs of ancestors, men walk along the roadside idly swinging their bush knives, and weather-beaten churches resound with the melodies of Sunday services.

INFORMATION

ANZ Bank (☎ 51213; Salelologa) Beside the market. Has a 24-hour ATM.

Internet access (Salelologa; per 30min ST14) In the same building as Savai'i Travel Centre.

Main post office (Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa) Doubles as a call centre (using phonecards).

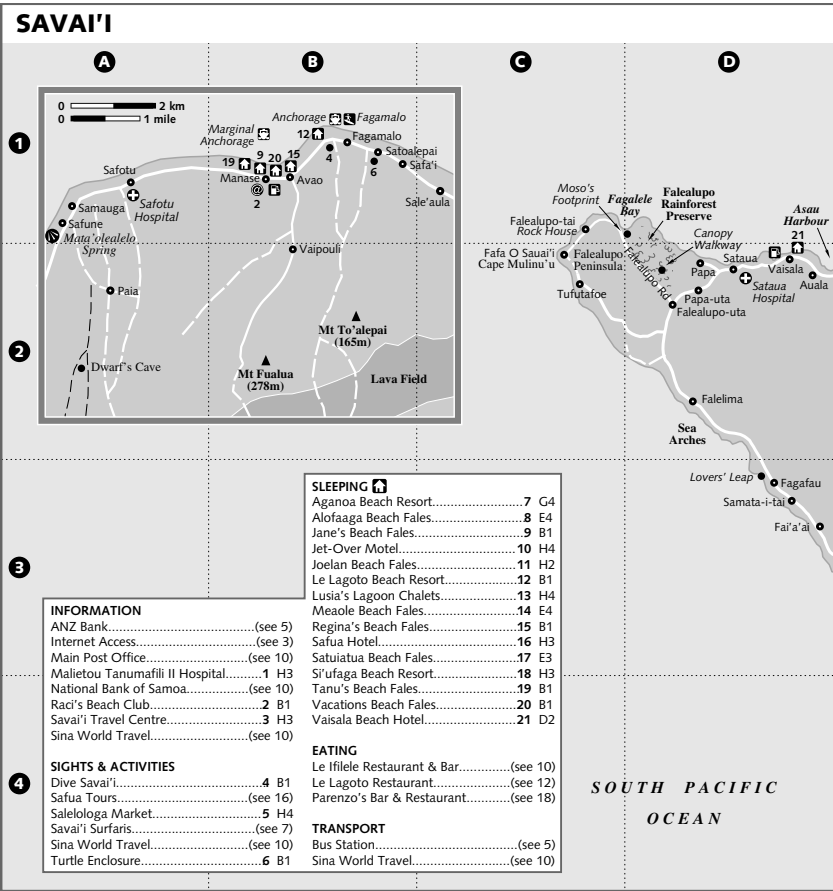
Malielou Tanumafili II Hospital (☎ 53511; Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi) Doctors are on call around the clock. There are other basic hospitals at Safotu, Sataua and Foailalo.

National Bank of Samoa (☎ 51398; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa)

Raci's Beach Club (☎ 54003; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; 1st 10min ST10, each subsequent min ST0.50) Another Internet-access provider.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hennie's Sports Bar (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22221; Fugalei St, Apia) Formerly known as JT's Sports Bar, this is a great place for a beer or a game of pool or darts. There are no pretensions here, just a boisterous crowd of drinkers who all seem to know each other and who seem more than happy to welcome newcomers. You can order snacks to soak up some of the booze.



Savai'i Travel Centre (☎ 51206; savaiitravelcentre@lesamoa.net; Salelologa) Arranges travel around the island. It's also an agent for Polynesian Airlines (☎ 22737/8).

Sina World Travel (☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa) Arranges Savai'i tours.

TRANSPORT

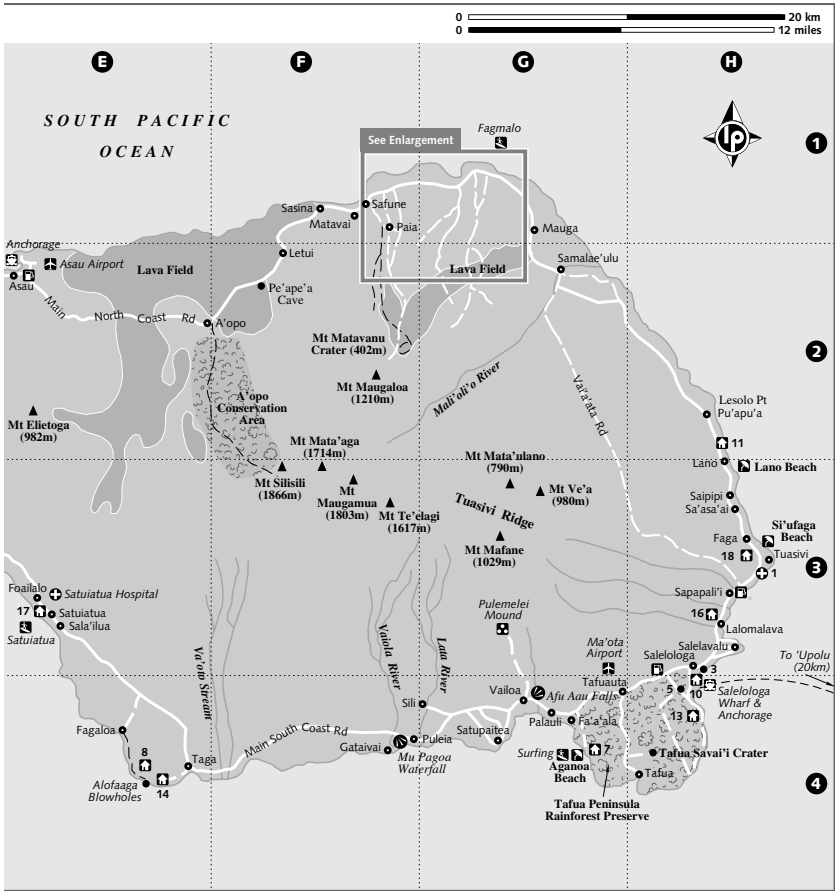
Getting There & Away

AIR
For details of Polynesian Airlines flights between 'Upolu and Savai'i, see p517.

BOAT
For information on the ferries that chug across Apolima Strait between Samoa's two main islands, see p517. Boats heading to/from 'Upolu use the wharf at Salelologa.

Getting Around
TO/FROM THE AIRPORT & WHARF
Whenever a plane arrives from 'Upolu at Ma'ota Airport, nearly every taxi on Savai'i is waiting for it, so there's no problem finding transport. To Salelologa, the fare is ST7.80 and to Tuasivi (about 13km) it's ST22. Public buses are convenient (and much cheaper) for getting to Salelologa from the airport, but if you're travelling to Tuasivi or further north, you'll have to change buses at Salelologa. Buses and taxis also greet every ferry arrival.

BUS
The colourful, crowded, personalised buses of Savai'i will be familiar to anyone who



has taken a bus ride on 'Upolu. Salelologa's market is the main terminal for Savai'i buses.

To head north to the Lava Field (ST2.50), take the Lava Field Express, which goes to Fagamalo. To go a little further west to Manase (ST3.10), take the Manase or Sasina bus. The Falealupo bus will take you up around the Falealupo Peninsula (ST4.50), while the Salega or Fagagau buses trundle past the Alofaaga Blowholes (ST2) and Satuiatua Beach (ST3). The most you'll pay is for the bus ride to Asau (ST5). Ferry passengers will have the most luck connecting with buses to out-of-the-way destinations – that is, beyond the cluster of villages along the southeast coast – as such

buses mostly depart as soon as the ferry comes in.

CAR
It's a joy to motor along the sealed Main Coast Rd that winds around the island, but keep an eye out for stray children, pigs, dogs and chickens. Off the main road you'll encounter a few bumpy tracks where at the very least you'll need a high-clearance 2WD (if not a 4WD if there's been heavy rain). These tracks include the steep, rocky climb up Mt Matavanu and the plantation tracks leading to Pulemelei Mound and through the Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve. There are several petrol stations along the east and north coasts.

Cars can be rented in Salelologa from several operators, including **Sina World Travel** (☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa), from about ST150 per day.

TAXI

Taxis are relatively expensive on Savai'i and useful only for short trips.

SALELOLOGA

There's not much to see in this rundown settlement except for assorted handicrafts on sale in the **market** (☎ early-late Mon-Sat). Otherwise, your main engagement with Savai'i's main town will be to stock up on supplies before heading further afield.

EAST COAST BEACHES

Along the east coast between Salelologa and Pu'apu'a there are nice beaches and good snorkelling. Many of the villages charge beach-access fees of ST2/5 per person/car. The best beaches are at **Sifufaga**, which boasts a brilliant turquoise-coloured lagoon, and **Lano**. The area also has numerous freshwater pools and springs for bathing.

LAVA FIELD

The Mt Matavanu eruptions between 1905 and 1911 created a moonscape in Savai'i's northeastern corner as a flow of hot lava 10m to 150m thick rolled over the top of plantations and villages. The Main North Coast Rd between Samalae'ulu and Sale'aula crosses this dark, fractured lava field and provides access to several fascinating sites. You might be tempted to race through this desolate landscape after snapping off a few quick photos, but it's worth lingering and letting your imagination try to re-create the fiery events that occurred here.

The modern, iron-roofed *fale* of the village of **Mauga** encircle a shallow, almost perfectly circular crater populated by banana palms. The access road is guarded by an enormous **Catholic church**. Approach a villager if you'd like to be shown around.

In Sale'aula, 5km north of Mauga, are several **lava-ruined churches** (admission ST3). On the western side of the 'Information Fale' is a trail leading to the **LMS Church**, where 2m of lava flowed through the front door and was eerily imprinted by corrugated iron when the roof collapsed. Beside the church is an old **cemetery**, while behind it a

short trail leads to the **Lava Field** proper, an expanse of twisted black rock stretching to the sea. North of the church is the **Virgin's Grave**, which purportedly marks the burial place of a girl so pure that the lava flowed around her grave, leaving it untouched.

TURTLES

In the village of Satoalepai is a small, man-made lagoon stocked with more than a dozen **turtles** (Satoalepai; admission ST10; ☎ 8am-5pm). You can swim with these wonderful creatures in the lagoon's clear waters; snorkels can be hired (ST5) to enhance the experience.

For some issues you might want to consider before visiting this and similar places, see the boxed text, below.

MT MATAVANU CRATER & DWARF'S CAVE

The crater of the volcano responsible for the devastation visited upon northeastern Savai'i a century ago is one of the highlights of a trip to the island. From Safotu take the turn-off to Paia village and from there the signposted track up the mountain; you can walk the 8km route from Paia, or drive up in a high-clearance 2WD (though a 4WD

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

Savai'i has many conservation initiatives that are genuine efforts to protect fragile environments. But some ventures are primarily money-raising schemes. It's hard to blame villagers for wanting to make more tala, but travellers should at least be aware of what they're supporting.

The turtle enclosure at Satoalepai (above), for instance, is a pleasant, well-maintained spot. But the family running it admit it's a business rather than a conservation effort. This, and the fact that the turtles have been removed from their natural environment, is worth remembering when deciding whether or not to visit it. We saw no sign of man-handling when we visited, but this would be something to watch out for.

In contrast, the so-called turtle pond in the neighbouring village of Safa'i comprises three turtles trapped in a murky, wire-enclosed pool. We saw the animals being badly manhandled and, in the interests of animal welfare, urge you not to support it.

is recommended). After a lengthy stint of bouncing over the old lava flow you'll reach the *fale* that serves as the headquarters of 'Da Craterman', who maintains the **crater track** (admission ST15; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat). He'll lead you the last 1km to the crater rim, where you can contemplate this extraordinary hole in the earth. If he's not around, just head up the track and you'll doubtless find him; the final climb to the crater begins at the sign reading 'Lemalola Aimasi Park'.

From Paia, you can also visit the **Dwarf's Cave** (Paia; guide per group ST20; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), an intriguing subterranean lava tube. It's signposted off the Main North Coast Rd, just west of the Mt Matavanu turn-off. In Paia, look for the faded red signpost on the right and wait outside the blue *fale* at this intersection; someone should appear to guide you to the cave. Bring your own torch and reliable footwear.

MATA'OLEALELO SPRING

This **freshwater spring** (Safune; admission per car ST5; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat) is officially claimed by Safune village, although it lies opposite the sign for Matavai village. From the road, head across the *kirikiti* pitch to indulge in a refreshing swim.

PE'APE'A CAVE

This **cave** (Main North Coast Rd; adult/child ST5/1; ☎ 8am-5pm) sits beside the coast road just south of Letui. A guided exploration of this small lava tube takes only 10 minutes, but you'll see white-rumped Polynesian swiftlets and their nests up close. Bring your own torch.

A'OPO CONSERVATION AREA & MT SILISILI

The two- to three-day return trip involved in a climb of Mt Silisili (1866m), the highest point in Samoa, exposes you to some wonderful rainforested sections of the A'opo Conservation Area and to Savai'i's mountainous backbone: the Tuasivi Ridge. To organise a guide for this trek, speak to the *pulenu'u* of A'opo (ask in the town's small shop for directions). You'll pay in the vicinity of ST40 per person per day for the guide and will need to supply food and water and all the requisite camping and hiking equipment.

FALEALUPO PENINSULA

Jutting out from the western end of Savai'i is the beautiful knob of land known as Falealupo Peninsula. Arrayed along it is a lovely, protected swathe of rainforest, complete with its own tree-top walkway, and several sites associated with significant Samoan legends. The peninsula's remoteness lends it an almost unnerving calm.

Falealupo Rainforest Preserve

Considered sacred by the villagers of Falealupo, the 1200-hectare area of low-land rainforest on the peninsula's northern side became the first customary-owned conservation area in Samoa in 1989. This was achieved thanks to the assistance of Dr Paul Alan Cox, an American ethnobotanist and founder of the conservation foundation Seacology. Dr Cox was working with indigenous healers in Falealupo when he discovered that the area's *matai* had reluctantly signed a contract with a Japanese logging firm in order to pay for the construction of a primary school. After watching the whole village weeping over the loss of their rainforest, Dr Cox personally guaranteed the money for the school. On learning of this, chief Fuiono Senio ran 9km through the forest to stop the bulldozers in their tracks. Unfortunately, the reserve suffered serious damage during the cyclones of the early '90s, but it is slowly and surely recovering.

Canopy Walkway

The 24m jerry-built bridge that is the centerpiece of this **walkway** (Falealupo Rd; admission ST20; ☎ 7am-6pm) is strung 9m above the rainforest floor and has quite a lurch to it, but it's perfectly safe. It's attached at one end to a magical 225-year-old banyan tree; you can climb to the top of it via a narrow stairway and can also spend the night here; see p511 for info on this unique accommodation option. The admission fee also covers entry to the Rock House and Moso's Footprint (keep the receipt as proof) and is payable at the *fale*-kiosk off Falealupo Rd, beside the primary school.

Moso's Footprint & Rock House

The ancient 1m by 3m rock enclosure called **Moso's Footprint** (Falealupo Rd; admission incl in Canopy Walkway ticket; ☎ 7am-6pm) is signposted beside

GATEWAY TO THE UNDERWORLD

The natural beauty of the Falealupo Peninsula belies the dark significance it holds for Samoans, who believe that the gateway to the underworld of the *aitu* (spirits) is located here: the place where the sun sets in the sea. According to tradition, there are two entrances to the underworld, one for chiefs and another for commoners. One entrance is through a cave near Cape Mulinu'u and the other is on the trail made by the setting sun over the sea. During the night, these spirits wander abroad, but at daybreak they must return to their hellish home or suffer the unpleasant consequences of being caught out by daylight.

a large white church. Legend has it that the giant Moso made the footprint when he stepped from Fiji to Samoa, but science holds that the 'footprint' was formed by the contraction and cooling of lava into a block that may then have been indented during a cyclone.

About 300m southwest of the ruins of an old Catholic church are the two lava tubes collectively known as the **Rock House** (Falealupo Rd; admission included in Canopy Walkway ticket; ☎ 7am-6pm). Legend says that the Rock House is the result of a house-building competition between Falealupo's men and women, a contest the women eventually won. Inside is a very crude stone armchair and stone benches around the sides.

Fafa O Sauai'i

At Cape Mulinu'u you'll find **Fafa O Sauai'i** (Falealupo Rd; admission per car ST10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), where you can stand at the end of the earth – conveniently indicated by a white cross – and look into tomorrow. Don't pass up a swim in the large rock pool created by the lava flow. The admission price is steep for solo travellers, but worthwhile for a group.

ALOFAAGA BLOWHOLES

These **blowholes** (Taga; adult/child ST5/2.50; ☎ 7am-6pm), in the south of the island, are close to their spectacular best at high tide, when they blast seawater tens of metres into the air. The full power of the blowholes is demonstrated on stormy days, when waves

crash into the rocky coast and water surges through the narrow lava chasms before being vented upwards. Pay admission at the first *fale* and park your car at the second *fale*, near the main blowhole; if you drive into the accommodation compound you'll be charged ST5 to park there. Don't get too close to the blowholes as huge freak waves occasionally break over the rocks.

AFU AAU FALLS

The gorgeous **Afu Au Falls** (off Main South Coast Rd; admission per person/car ST2/10; ☎ 7am-5pm), also known as Olemoe Falls, reward visitors with a dreamy tropical seclusion and a refreshing swim in a snug, 3m-deep waterhole. Head down the track flanked by iron poles that starts about 300m beyond the iron-girder bridge located west of Vailoa village. Pay admission at the *fale* (also covers entry to Pulemelei Mound), then continue for 500m to the waterfall sign and follow the side trail on foot across an idyllic little valley. You can normally negotiate the bumpy plantation track in a high-clearance 2WD, except after heavy rain.

PULEMELEI MOUND

Polynesia's largest ancient structure is the wondrous, pyramidal **Pulemelei Mound** (off Main South Coast Rd; admission incl in Afu Au Falls ticket; ☎ 7am-5pm), marked on some local maps as Tia Seu Ancient Mound. It measures 61m by 50m at its base and rises up commandingly to a height of more than 12m. It's a stirring place, with views from its stony summit both to the ocean and into thick, primordial jungle. On sunny days, butterflies of all colours swarm across it.

To get there, follow the directions to Afu Au Falls given in the previous section. Continue past the waterfall sign and follow the main track as it veers left (ignore the other track that continues ahead). You'll soon reach the short signposted walking trail to the mound. You can drive all the way to the start of this trail, but the hike through the lush heartland of Letolo Plantation is well worth it.

TAFUA PENINSULA RAINFOREST PRESERVE

This **preserve** (admission ST2) on Tafua Peninsula contains superb stands of rainforest and rugged stretches of lava coast studded with cliffs

and sea arches. A highlight of the preserve is the extinct Tafua Savai'i crater, which rises above the village of Tafua. The crater is choked with vegetation and has a lost-world feel to it, which is enhanced by glimpses of the relatively rare Samoan flying fox circling the tree tops.

To get here, take the side road signposted opposite Ma'ota Airport and pay the custom fee about 50m along. About 2.6km from the main road turn left on to a pair of ruts (if you reach the Tafua village sign, you've gone too far) and drive for 650m along this bumpy track to where there's a small, car-sized clearing on the right, opposite a large tree (if the road starts sloping downwards, you've gone too far). The trail to the crater (15 minutes) is easy to follow from here. You can also approach a Tafua villager to guide you to this trail.

At the western end of Fa'a'ala village, a track leads to lovely **Aganoa Beach** (per person/surfer ST5/20). There are strong currents here so swim with care. Pay fees at Kahuna Bar & Grill (p510) at the Aganoa Beach Resort.

ACTIVITIES

Scuba divers should contact **Dive Savai'i** (☎ 59622; www.divesavaii.com; Main North Coast Rd, Fagamalo), located just west of Fagamalo, which conducts four-day PADI open-water courses (ST1000) and organises regional dives (one/two dives ST150/220). The waters off Fagamalo also generate fine **surf** when swells arrive from the north (usually between December and April). Surfers will also find an excellent left-hand surf-break at **Satuiatua**; a ST10 fee is levied, which is used to support the local school.

Surf tours of the 'big island' are conducted by **Savai'i Surfaris** (☎ 58248; for local inquiries fax 58007), based at Aganoa Beach. Bookings are through **Atoll Travel** (☎ 03-5682 1088; www.atolltravel.com) in Australia. Seven-night surfer packages, excluding airfares, cost around A\$960 per person (A\$870 per person for twin share), which includes two daily meals, transfers and *fale* accommodation.

Keen walkers can follow an old track around the coast from Alofaaga Blowholes to the now deserted village of **Fagaloa** (three to four hours return). They can also walk up Mt Matavanu (p506), stride across what was once the island's biggest plantation to Afu Au Falls (opposite) and Pulemelei

Mound (opposite), and, for an encore, scale Mt Silisili (p507).

TOURS

Green Turtle Tours (☎ 22144, 29229; www.greenturtle.com) Apia-based company operating a daily hop-on, hop-off bus service around Savai'i, and also offering day tours of the island. For more information, see p497.

Safua Tours (☎ 51271; Safua Hotel, Main South Coast Rd, Lalomalava) Based at the Safua Hotel (p510), this outfit conducts knowledgeable day tours (ST125) of Savai'i's south and north coasts, visiting unforgettable places such as Afu Au Falls and the Alofaaga Blowholes. It also organises village stays for around ST60 per person (including transport and meals).

Sina World Travel (☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa) Offers everything from laid-back beach tours to hikes up Mt Silisili. Half-/full-day tours cost ST75/150; a minimum of three people is usually required.

SLEEPING

There are a couple of places to stay in Salelologa, but it's only once you head out of town that you really start to experience the restful charms of Savai'i. There's a bottle-neck of accommodation at lovely Manase, where numerous *fale* providers compete for the beachfront business.

Salelologa & Around

Aganoa Beach Resort (☎ 50180; www.atolltravel.com/samoa/samoasavaii.htm; Fa'a'ala; nonsurfer/surfer ST80/100) This resort exploits the beauty of

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lusia's Lagoon Chalets (☎ 51487, 25018; www.lusiaslagoonchalets.ws; fale per person ST35-45; ☎) Lusia's is an excellent place to stay. For starters, it's only 1km southwest of Salelologa's wharf and so provides easy access to the island's main arrival/departure point. But its main attraction is its setting of raised *fale* amid jungly foliage on the edge of a sublime little bay. When you head to your *fale* at night after enjoying one of the creative meals at the on-site restaurant (mains ST8 to ST25; open breakfast, lunch and dinner), you feel like you're disappearing into your own private retreat. There's a rock pool here that's sometimes visited by a sea turtle, and you can swim, snorkel (hire ST5) or canoe (hire ST10) straight off the waterfront deck.

a fine little beach and some excellent associated surf-breaks on the western edge of Tafua Peninsula. Nonsurfers can snuggle down in the bed-equipped *fale* (breakfast and dinner included in the price) after a long day of inactivity. Day visitors pay ST5 and day surfers ST20. Basic lunches are served up at the resort's Kahuna Bar & Grill (meals ST6 to ST15).

Joelan Beach Fales (☎ 778 1956; Main North Coast Rd, Lano; *fale* per person incl breakfast & dinner ST50) Joelan's is a basic *fale* setup that has tons of beachy character. Swimming and snorkelling are popular pastimes here, or you can just wander through Lano village and occasionally glance at the silhouette of 'Upolu across Apolima Strait. **Si'ufaga Beach Resort** (☎ 53518; www.siufaga.com; Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi; s ST70-320, d ST90-350; ☒ ☒) Long, languid Si'ufaga Beach easily rates as one of the best strips of sand on Savai'i, and the resort set up across the road from the palm trees and the turquoise water is fully aware of this. Units closest to the beach have enough facilities – bathroom, fridge and cable TV – to tempt you to stay awhile, while Parenzo's Bar & Restaurant (opposite) is a decent place to gorge yourself on pasta.

Jet-Over Motel (☎ 51565; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa; r ST110-120; ☒ ☒) You'll find this curious little motel at the back of the Blue Bird Mall in downtown Salelologa. Your money gets you little in the way of character or views, but you do get large, modern and well-equipped rooms.

Safua Hotel (☎ 51271; safuahotel@yahoo.com; Main South Coast Rd, Lalomalava; *fale* s/d/f incl breakfast ST80/110/140) The Safua Hotel is not as attractive or well-maintained as it was in its heyday, and is situated well away from the oceanfront. But beds are reasonably priced, there's a nightly dinner buffet (ST38), and you can arrange worthwhile excursions through the in-house Safua Tours (p509).

Northeastern Savai'i

Regina's Beach Fales (☎ 596026; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; *fale* per person incl meals ST50) Regina's consistently gets high marks from visitors for its generous hospitality, which includes a no-fuss approach to guests and well-maintained, colourful *fale* arrayed along the beach. Mealtimes are more like low-key social events, with the excellent food served up at a communal dining table. We

met several travellers who had stayed here before and couldn't stay away.

Jane's Beach Fales (☎ 54066; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; *fale* per person incl breakfast & dinner ST50) Jane's is another well-rated accommodation provider on the crowded Manase strip. There's little to get worked up about here, except maybe the dazzling waters off the beach and the convivial atmosphere. There's also a bar, and canoes can be hired for ST10.

Le Lagoto Beach Resort (☎ 58189; lelagoto@samoa.ws; Main North Coast Rd, Fagalamo; s & d ST250-450, each extra person ST22; ☒) If you'd prefer a self-contained bungalow to another *fale*, check out the impressive options at Le Lagoto. Each of the units has a bathroom, TV and kitchenette, plus easy access to a delightful little cove. Le Lagoto Restaurant (opposite) is also worth a look.

Vacations Beach Fales (☎ 54024; www.savaiivacations.com; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; *fale* per person ST70) Vacations is pricier than most of its neighbours, but the *fale* here are bigger and the mattresses more cushy than at other places. You could also do worse than spend an afternoon or two sampling the stock at the beachfront Jetty Bar.

Tanu's Beach Fales (☎/fax 54050; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; *fale* per person incl breakfast & dinner ST50) Tanu's has traded off a well-deserved reputation for many years, and its success is obvious from the sheer number of *fale* dotting the sand here. But it's arguably getting too big to maintain the personal nature that travellers previously found so appealing. Rates include breakfast and dinner.

Northwestern Savai'i

Vaisala Beach Hotel (☎ 58016; fax 58017; off Main North Coast Rd, Vaisala; s/d/tr/q/f from ST90/105/115/125/140; ☒) This hotel faces a peaceful little beach that it has all to itself. Upper-level rooms (breakfast included in the price) have balconies where you can contemplate the horizon or the antics of day-trippers on the sand below. The hotel's restaurant (lunch ST6 to ST15, dinner ST38; open lunch and dinner) also has an outdoor deck and does satisfying set-menu dinners occasionally attended by local musicians.

Satuiatua Beach Fales (☎/fax 56026; Main South Coast Rd, Satuiatua; *fale* per person incl breakfast & dinner ST65) The beach here is good for snorkelling and surfing, but it will be up to you to decide if this justifies the unusually high

accommodation rate. The restaurant (lunch ST6 to ST12, dinner ST25; open lunch and dinner) is set up on a spacious outdoor deck and does good dinners.

The Canopy Walkway (p507) in the Falealupo Rainforest Preserve offers accommodation in the top of a **banyan tree** (per person ST50). This roofless treehouse sleeps up to six people and mattresses and mosquito nets are provided. Breakfast and dinner are included in the price and are served down on terra firma. There's no telephone number for bookings; if you're interested, just turn up.

Southern Savai'i

Alofaaga Beach Fales (☎ 594406; Taga; *fale* per person incl breakfast & dinner ST60) This grouping of sturdy *fale* lies in its own compound opposite the spectacular antics of the Alofaaga Blowholes and is ideal for those who want lengthy exposure to this restless stretch of coastline. The phone number belongs to the 3-Corner Store in Taga; ask for Juna.

Meaole Beach Fales (Taga; *fale* per person incl meals ST70) Meaole lies just east of the Alofaaga Blowholes in a distinctive tropical setting, planted on black volcanic sand on the edge of a rough and rocky beach. The price is relatively expensive for what's on offer.

EATING & DRINKING

Most *fale* providers include at least breakfast and dinner in the price of an overnight stay; for details of these deals, and of the generic eateries (and bars) associated with many local hotels and resorts, see the reviews in the previous Sleeping section. Following are reviews for a handful of places worth visiting purely for their menus and drink selections.

Le Ifilele Restaurant & Bar (☎ 51299; behind Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa; meals ST9-40; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Le Ifilele is spread out on a small terrace at the back of the Blue Bird Mall in Salelologa. Diners and drinkers crowd around the tiny bar or nab one of the waterfront dining *fale*.

Le Lagoto Restaurant (☎ 58189; Main North Coast Rd, Fagalamo; breakfast & lunch ST15, dinner ST30-40; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Situated in the Le Lagoto Beach Resort in Fagalamo, this restaurant-bar uses its tranquil setting on a crisp, little-used beach to good effect. Curries, pastas and several vegetarian options highlight the eclectic menu.

Parenzo's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 53518; Si'ufaga Beach Resort, Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi; pasta around ST21) Parenzo's commands the top floor of the reception building at Si'ufaga Beach Resort. Eat pasta dishes and seafood on the balcony overlooking the palm-fringed sea.

Another excellent option is the restaurant at Lusia's Lagoon Chalets (p509).

SAMOA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

It's fair to say that accommodation options in Samoa are fairly limited. There's little budget accommodation outside the ubiquitous *fale*, and at the other end of the scale only Aggie Grey's hotels on 'Upolu qualify as truly luxurious. In between is a mishmash of upmarket resorts and midrange hotels (a few of them overpriced) and motels. That said, much of the country's accommodation occupies idyllic settings on the beautiful sands that border 'Upolu and Savai'i – this meets the minimum requirements for most visitors.

The accommodation listed in this chapter appears in order of author preference; leading each section are the places our author recommends the most. In Samoa, we generally treat any place that charges up

PRACTICALITIES

- Samoa's main newspaper is the *Samoa Observer* (ST2), published daily except Monday. The monthly magazine *Tapu* (ST5) declares itself the 'magazine from the Samoas, Niue and Tokelau' and has an interesting mix of current affairs, culture, sports and business.
- Listen to popular music on Magik 98FM or the government-run AM station Radio 2AP. TV Samoa broadcasts mainly overseas programmes.
- The video format used is NTSC.
- Use Australian-style three-blade plugs to access Samoan electricity (240V, 50Hz AC).
- Samoa uses the standard metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

to ST100 as budget accommodation. Mid-range places usually cost between ST100 and ST250, while we regard anywhere charging over ST250 as top-end accommodation.

An excellent source of information on accommodation around 'Upolu and Savai'i in Samoa is the **Samoa Hotels Association** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 30160; Beach Rd, Apia).

The thatch-roofed shelters called *fale* are sometimes enclosed but are usually open-sided. Sleeping mats and mosquito nets are always supplied. *Fale* can cost anywhere from ST30 to ST90 per person. The more expensive ones come with oil lamps and occasionally electric lights, a table and chairs, and sometimes a bed as opposed to a mat. Bathroom facilities are usually basic, with cold water being the norm. The price usually includes at least breakfast and dinner.

Hotel, motel and resort accommodation ranges from rooms in slightly dilapidated buildings to well-maintained rooms with air-conditioning, a fridge, TV and a bathroom. There's often access to a shared kitchen. Smaller resorts tend to offer self-contained accommodation in cabins. Big, upmarket resorts prefer to reside on 'Upolu, where they provide swim-up cocktail bars and lavish meals.

Stays with families in local villages can be organised through Safua Tours (p509).

ACTIVITIES

For full details of where you can undertake the following activities (as well as golfing and kayaking) and which organisations can help you on your way, please see the Activities sections for 'Upolu (p496) and Savai'i (p509).

Diving

Outside the lagoons that encircle Samoa's main islands are some fantastic diving sites. Many of the most popular sites are close to the villages of Maninoa and Si'umu on the south coast of 'Upolu.

These include 'The Aquarium', which sports a variety of outcrops and bommies at 10m to 15m depth, cloaked with a wide variety of lettuce, brain and other coral; 'Christmas Tree Rock', atop which is a giant pink gorgonian sea fan with a sprinkling of black coral at its base; 'Garden Wall', which is a densely packed wall of colourful hard

coral ranging from 6m down to 30m; and 'The Terraces', where large sea anemones, their attendant clown fish, schooling tropical fish and, occasionally, dolphins and turtles can be seen.

See p73 for further details of dive sites in Samoa.

Fishing

Samoa reefs and their fishing rights are owned by villagers, so you can't just drop a line anywhere; seek permission first. If you'd like to go fishing with locals, inquire at your hotel or beach *fale*, or speak to the *pulenu'u* of the village concerned.

Game fishing is becoming increasingly popular in the islands – in fact, Samoa has been rated one of the top 10 game fishing destinations in the world. The Samoa International Game Fishing Tournament takes place around 'Upolu during the second week of May.

Hiking

Samoa's rugged coastal areas, sandy beaches, lush rainforests and volcanoes all invite explorations on foot. However, trails can quickly become obscured because of the lush tropical environment and some half-hearted track maintenance. Combine this with the effects of heavy rain and there's often a good chance of getting lost (or at least covering yourself in mud). For more remote treks, it pays to take a guide with you.

Guiding costs vary enormously. Sometimes villagers will be happy to accompany you for nothing and at other times they'll be seeking goods as a reward (ie cigarettes), but mostly they'll be interested in cash.

Even on short walks, the sun and the almost perpetually hot and humid conditions can take their toll. Be sure to carry insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes, antihistamines to counter wasp stings if you're allergic to them, sufficient water and salty snacks to replenish body elements lost to heavy sweating, and always protect yourself from the sun with a hat and sunblock. Good walking shoes are also essential.

Snorkelling & Swimming

Samoa offers abundant snorkelling and swimming opportunities, most of which involve walking into reef-sheltered waters

straight from a beach. Always ask permission from local villagers before using their beach. More and more places are hiring out snorkelling gear, but it's still well worth bringing your own mask and snorkel with you.

Surfing

Powerful conditions, sharp reefs, and off-shore breaks that are difficult to access mean that surfing in Samoa is challenging, to say the very least, and probably one of the worst places in the world to learn the sport! While the surf can be unbelievable at times, offering waves of a lifetime in glorious surroundings, conditions are generally difficult to assess, with some very dangerous situations awaiting the inexperienced or reckless. Despite all this, the islands have become an increasingly popular destination for experienced surfers. The wet season (November to April) brings swells from the north; the dry season (May to November) brings big swells from the south.

It's best to hook up with a surfing outfit. They know all the best spots and provide boat transport to them, and, perhaps more importantly, they have established relationships with local villagers and understand the culture – they know where it is and isn't OK to surf.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are usually open from 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday (some branches open Saturday between 8.30am and 12.30pm). Shops usually operate from 8am to 4.30pm on weekdays and from 8am to noon on Saturday, though kiosks and convenience stores keep longer hours. Eateries serve breakfast and lunch between 8am and 4pm, and dinner from 6pm to around 10pm. Bars in the main towns often open for drinking around lunchtime and tend to point patrons to the front door at midnight. Government offices open from 8am to 4.30pm.

On Sunday, almost everything is closed, although ripples of activity appear in the evening. Markets normally get under way by about 6am; the Maketi Fou in Apia is active more or less 24 hours a day.

We don't give opening hours for establishments mentioned in the text unless they differ greatly from the standard hours outlined above.

For information about Samoan public holidays, see p829.

CHILDREN

The Samoan climate (excepting the long periods of heavy rain or the odd cyclone of course), warm waters and dearth of poisonous creatures make the islands a paradise for children. You'll find that Samoans tend to lavish attention on very young children, which means that foreign toddlers will not by any means be starved for attention or affection while visiting the islands.

Never leave your child unsupervised near beaches, reefs or on walking tracks, particularly those running along coastal cliffs (these are never fenced). Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children* has useful advice on family travel.

For favoured childish activities on 'Upolu, see the 'Upolu for Children section (p497). For details of the practicalities concerning children visiting the South Pacific, see p826.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Samoa Embassies & Consulates

In countries without Samoan diplomatic posts, Samoa is represented by New Zealand and British diplomatic missions. Samoa has its own diplomatic representation in the following countries:

Australia (☎ 02-6286 5505; fax 02-6286 5678;

13 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, ACT 2606)

Belgium (☎ 322-675 0336; fax 322-675 0336; 123 Ave Franklin Roosevelt, 1050 Brussels)

New Zealand (High Commission; ☎ 04-472 0953; fax 04-471 2479; 1A Wesley Rd, Kelburn, PO Box 1430, Wellington)

USA (☎ 212-599 0797; fax 212-599 0797; 800 2nd Avenue, Suite 400D, New York, NY 10017) UN Mission.

Embassies & Consulates in Samoa

Following is a list of countries with diplomatic missions based in Apia.

Australia (Map pp490-1; ☎ 23411; www.embassy.gov.au/ws.html; Beach Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Canadian consular services are also provided here.

China (Map pp486-7; ☎ 22474; www.china-embassy.ch; Cross Island Rd, Vailima)

New Zealand (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21711; Beach Rd;

☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, to 1pm Fri)

USA (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21631; 5th fl, ACB Bldg, Apia;

☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

WORMS RISE AT MIDNIGHT

Sometime in October or November, on the seventh day after the full moon, the palolo reefworm or, more technically, a polychaete worm of the *Eunicidae* family (*Eunice viridis*) emerges from the coral reefs to mate. The blue-green vermicelli-shaped worms, rich in calcium, iron and protein, are a prized delicacy in much of the South Pacific. The worms are said to taste like creamy caviar and, according to some, are a great aphrodisiac. Parties take place on beaches throughout Samoa while villagers anxiously anticipate the big event (and, of course, after the big event itself). When the worms finally appear at around midnight, crowds carrying nets and lanterns hurriedly wade into the sea to scoop them up.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The main causes of celebration across Samoa include the country's independence celebrations over the first three days of June; the Teuila Festival in Apia in September, when Samoa's capital reels in the tourists with canoe races, food and craft stalls, traditional dancing and a beauty pageant; and White Sunday, the day that Samoan children rule the roost, which is held on the second Sunday in October.

In August/September 2007, Apia will again host the **South Pacific Games** (www.internationalgames.net/southpac.htm). Another event to look out for is the Rise of Palolo celebrations in October; see the boxed text, above.

INTERNET ACCESS

It's usually only top-end hotels and resorts that can help those who have brought their own computers to Samoa and want to connect to the Internet. Otherwise, your only option for accessing the Web (assuming your accommodation provider doesn't have any terminals for guests' use) is an Internet café. Note that Web connections can drop out with frustrating frequency on these remote islands. There are several Internet cafés scattered around Apia; see p485 for more details. On Savai'i, get connected in Salelologa and Manase; see p503. On 'Upolu, expect to pay up to ST4 per 15 minutes of access; on Savai'i you pay up to ST10 for the same amount of access.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Samoa Observer (www.samoaoobserver.ws) The website of the country's main newspaper is a good resource for news and current affairs relating to Samoa, as well as the Pacific region as a whole.

Samoa Tourism Authority (www.visitsamoa.ws) A comprehensive site for independent Samoa, with an

up-to-date events calendar and easy-to-browse information on activities, attractions and useful organisations.

Samoa Hotels Association (www.samoahotels.ws) This is an extensive, regularly updated listing of Samoan places to stay, and includes photos of many of the properties.

Samoa Sensation (www.samoa.co.uk) Good general site with many useful links, a question-and-answer forum, and a good selection of Samoa-centric books that can be ordered online.

MAPS

The Tourism Authority in Apia (see p486) distributes the free, superbasic *Jasons Samoa Visitor Map*. It also sells the much more detailed 1:200,000 *Samoa* map published by Hema (ST10), but it's woefully out of date.

The **Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 23800; Beach Rd) in Apia sells 1:50,000 topographic sheet maps of 'Upolu (two sheets) and Savai'i (four sheets) for ST30 per sheet. Unfortunately, they haven't been updated since 2000. Pay for the maps at the ministry office beside the NZ High Commission and then pick them up from a second office near the deep sea wharf.

The University of Hawai'i's *Islands of Samoa* map (US\$4) contains topographic detail of Samoa, comprehensive labelling of geographic names and a useful index. On the down side, it was last updated in 1990. In Apia it's usually available from **Aggie Grey's Gift Shop** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 22880; Beach Rd).

MONEY

The tala (dollar), which is divided into 100 sene (cents), is the unit of currency in use in Samoa. In this book, unless otherwise stated, all prices given are in tala. Exchange rates are given in the following table.

Country	Unit	Tala
Australia	A\$1	ST2.18
Canada	C\$1	ST2.59
CFP zone	100 CFP	ST3.04
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	ST5.59
euro zone	€1	ST3.64
Fiji	F\$1	ST1.68
Japan	¥100	ST2.54
NZ	NZ\$1	ST1.83
Solomon Islands	S\$1	40 sene
Tonga	T\$1	ST1.44
UK	£1	ST5.27
USA	US\$1	ST2.89
Vanuatu	100Vt	ST2.64

ATMs

Branches of the ANZ, Westpac and several local banks in the main towns of Samoa are equipped with ATMs. Be aware that ATMs don't always operate 24 hours, and that they can be prone to running out of bills at the start of the weekend. Take plenty of cash with you (in small denominations) when you're heading outside the bigger settlements.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected or encouraged in Samoa. It is, however, deemed acceptable for exceptional service at finer restaurants.

HOW MUCH?

- **Meal in a fine-dining restaurant:** from about ST25
- **Female accommodation:** from ST35 per night
- **Admission to Afu Aau Falls:** ST2 per person
- **Day tour of 'Upolu:** ST90
- **Car hire:** about ST150 per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of unleaded petrol:** ST2.15
- **1L of bottled water:** ST3.50 to ST5
- **355mL bottle of Vailima beer:** ST3 to ST4
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** ST12
- **Palusami:** ST1

TELEPHONE

The telecommunications provider in Samoa is **SamoaTel** (Map pp490-1; www.samoatel.ws; Beach Rd, Apia). A three-minute local call costs ST0.50. International calls from Samoa to Australia or New Zealand cost around ST3 per minute and calls to the USA ST4.50 per minute. Collect and credit-card international calls can be made from public phones by dialling ☎ 957.

Mobile Phones

Samoa runs on an analogue system. You can organise for a local number to be allocated to your phone (if compatible) through **Telecom Samoa Cellular** (☎ 26081). Charges will be deducted from your credit card.

Phone Codes

The country code for Samoa is ☎ 685. The nation does not use area codes.

Phonecards

Phonecards are available for ST5, ST10, ST20 and ST50, and can be used in around 75 cardphones around 'Upolu and Savai'i.

TIME

Samoa is just east of the International Date Line, which means its dates are the same as those of North America. Local time is Greenwich Mean Time/Coordinated Universal Time (GMT/UTC) minus 11 hours. Therefore, when it's noon in Samoa, it's 11pm the same day in London, 3pm the same day in Los Angeles, and 9am the following day in Sydney.

VISAS

A free, 60-day visitor permit is granted to all visitors on arrival in Samoa – except for nationals of China who must obtain a visa beforehand – provided they have an onward ticket and a passport valid for at least another six months. You'll also be required to provide a contact address within the country, so have the name of a hotel ready upon arrival. Vaccinations for yellow fever may be required if you are coming from an infected area.

Samoa visitor permits may be extended by several weeks at a time by the country's **Immigration Office** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20291; www.samoaimmigration.gov.ws; Convent St, Apia; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri). Take along your passport,

wallet, two passport-sized photos and don't make any other plans for the rest of the day. You may also need to have proof of hotel accommodation, onward transport and sufficient funds for your requested period of stay.

TRANSPORT IN SAMOA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

While Samoa isn't as remote or obscure a destination as Tuvalu or Kiribati, it's not as popular as Fiji or Tahiti either (not yet anyway), and airfares often reflect this. Access to the island group is fairly straightforward from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Hawai'i or Los Angeles. From anywhere else, however, travelling there will almost always entail reaching one of these connecting points first. Auckland and Nadi/Suva seem to be the most convenient and best-served runs, and there are often some good discount fares on these routes. Samoa is also popular as a stopover or cheap 'optional extra' on some tickets and round-the-world fares between Europe or North America and New Zealand.

You can fly direct between Samoa and American Samoa with Inter-Island Airways and Polynesian Airlines for around US\$180 one way. Polynesian Blue fares to Apia from Sydney, Australia, start around A\$450, though keep in mind that this was an introductory fare at the time of writing and prices may rise (probably not by much though) if the route proves popular. One-way fares from Auckland, New Zealand, to Apia start from NZ\$570. An Air New Zealand flight from London to Apia, via Los Angeles, is the most straightforward option for travel from Europe to Samoa; high-season fares from London start from UK£1500. Air New Zealand also offers direct Los Angeles–Apia flights (from US\$620 one way).

Visitors to Samoa jet in to Faleolo Airport, located 35km west of Apia. Airlines that service the region include the following (all phone numbers mentioned here are for dialling from within Samoa):

Air New Zealand (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20825; www.airnz.com; Lotemau Centre, cnr Convent & Mt Vaea Sts, Apia)

Air Pacific (☎ 22738; www.airpacific.com)

Inter-Island Airways (www.interislandair.com)

Pacific Blue (www.flypacificblue.com)

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 22737; www.polynesianairlines.com)

Polynesian Blue (www.polynesianblue.com)

Qantas (☎ 21261; www.qantas.com.au)

Sea

CARGO SHIP

Three cargo ships sail between Apia in Samoa and the remote Tokelau Islands. Bookings for the 20-hour trip can be made in Apia at the **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20822; Fugalei St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). You must obtain a permit to visit Tokelau before booking. Sailings are usually fortnightly but occasionally more frequent sailings are arranged. Return deck fares are NZ\$290/145 per adult/child; return cabin fares are NZ\$530/270.

FERRY

The **Samoa Shipping Corporation** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 20935/6; reservations@samoashipping.com; Beach Rd, Apia) runs a car ferry called *Lady Naomi* between Apia and Pago Pago (American Samoa) once a week. It departs Apia on Wednesday at midnight and returns on Thursday at 4.30pm. The trip takes seven hours each way. The return deck/cabin fare from Apia to Pago Pago is ST100/140. Note that American passport holders can only buy one-way tickets from Apia.

YACHT

Between May and October (outside the cyclone season) the harbours of the South Pacific swarm with cruising yachts from around the world, many following the favourable winds west from the Americas, while others come north from New Zealand. Apia serves as the official entry points for private yacht owners visiting Samoa. In Savai'i, there are also anchorages at Fagamalo, Salelologa Wharf and Asau Harbour.

Visiting yachts must apply for clearance from the **Prime Minister's Department** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21339; 5th fl, Government Office Bldg, Beach Rd) in Apia; bear left as you exit the elevator and take the unmarked door straight through the

archway. The captain will need to present crew passports and the boat's registration papers.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Polynesian Airlines (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21261; www.polynesianairlines.com; NPF Bldg, Beach Rd, Apia; ☎ 8am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) flies between Fagali'i Airport, just east of Apia on 'Upolu, and Ma'ota Airport, 5km west of Salelologa on Savai'i. There are usually two to three services a day and the fare is from ST50/95 one way/return.

Bicycle

Touring 'Upolu and Savai'i by bicycle is a scenic, mostly relaxed option for fit, experienced cyclists – we say 'mostly' because aggressive dogs are a prevalent problem. The roads are generally in good condition and traffic is minimal. The major roads encircling the islands are sealed, but you'd need a sturdy mountain bike to tackle most of the trails to beaches and other coastal attractions. You can transport a bike between Samoa's two main islands on the ferry that crosses Apolima Strait (see below).

A big challenge for cyclists is the heat. Even during the coolest months of the year (July, August and September), afternoon temperatures will still be high. Plan to avoid cycling long stretches in the heat of the day. Also bear in mind that buses are unlikely to be able to accommodate bicycles should you run out of leg power.

Bikes are a common form of local transport in Samoa, so it shouldn't be hard to track down a bike repairer if you really need one. But it's obviously best to bring your own comprehensive bike repair kit, a decent lock and heavy-duty panniers. Some accommodation providers rent bikes, but these are for day touring, not long-distance rides.

Boat

Ferries regularly plough the 22km across Apolima Strait between 'Upolu and Savai'i. Tickets cost ST9/65 per person/car. Large ferries officially depart the Mulifanua Wharf on 'Upolu and the Salelologa Wharf on Savai'i every two hours between 6am and 4pm Wednesday to Monday, while a smaller ferry services this route at less regular intervals on Tuesday. Sailing times are

thrown into turmoil, however, when big swells roll across the strait and slow the ferries down.

Vehicles should be prebooked through the **Samoa Shipping Corporation** (in Apia ☎ 20935, in Salelologa 51477) to ensure a place.

Bus

Travelling by public bus in Samoa is an experience that shouldn't be missed. The buses are vibrantly coloured, wooden-seated vehicles (prepare yourself for hard jolts) that blast music at volumes that, depending on your opinion of Samoan pop music, inspire you to either boogie while sitting down or become ill with a throbbing headache. But unique as the vehicles are, bus travel is also problematic because services operate at the whim of the drivers. If a driver feels like knocking off at 1pm, they do, and passengers counting on the service are left stranded. Never rely on catching a bus after about 2pm. Buses are also scarce on Saturday afternoon and often only cater to church services on Sunday.

All buses prominently display the name of their destination in the front window. To stop a bus, wave your hand and arm, palm down, as the bus approaches. To signal that you'd like to get off the bus, either knock on the ceiling or clap loudly. Fares are paid to the driver – try to have as near to the exact change as possible.

Although most visitors don't notice it at first, there is a seating hierarchy on Samoan buses. For example, unmarried women normally sit together, while foreigners and older people must have a seat and sit near the front of the bus. Don't worry about arranging this yourself – the Samoans will see to it that everything is sorted out. The way in which Samoans stack themselves on top of each other on crowded buses without losing any dignity is akin to a social miracle.

Details about specific routes and fares are provided under the Transport headings at the start of the 'Upolu (p488) and Savai'i (p504) sections.

Car

Getting around by car in Samoa is quite straightforward. The coastal roads on both main islands are sealed and the general condition of most other roads has improved markedly in recent years. A 4WD

DEPARTURE TAX

An international departure tax of ST40 is payable when flying out of Samoa.

will make trips down rough, unsealed side roads much more comfortable, but nearly all of these side routes can be tackled in a high-clearance 2WD. After heavy rain, however, some roads will be inaccessible to 2WD vehicles.

At the time of writing, motorcycles were not available for hire in Samoa.

DRIVING LICENCE

Visitors to Samoa need to obtain a temporary driving licence from the **Ministry of Works, Transport & Infrastructure** (Map pp490-1; ☎ 21611; Beach Rd; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) in Apia. A licence valid for two/three months will cost ST10/50.

HIRE

For details of car-hire firms on 'Upolu, see p488; for details of car-hire possibilities on Savai'i, see p505.

When hiring a vehicle, check for any damage or scratches before you get into the car and note everything on the rental agreement, lest you be held liable for damage when the car is returned. Furthermore, fend off requests to leave your passport or a cash deposit against possible damages.

Note that you can take hire cars from 'Upolu over to Savai'i and back, but cars hired on Savai'i cannot be taken over to 'Upolu.

INSURANCE

It's essential to have your hire car covered by insurance, as repair costs are extremely high in Samoa. Insurance costs aren't always included in the price of a quote, so always double-check this. Hire cars are subject to a ST2500 insurance excess (non-reduceable) in the event of any accident that's your fault.

ROAD RULES

Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road. The speed limit within central Apia and through adjacent villages is 40km/h; outside populated areas it's 55km/h.

Local Transport

TAXI

On 'Upolu, taxis can be a useful transport option for day-tripping – see p488 for details of prices – but the same can't be said for taxis on Savai'i, which are only convenient for short trips.

American Samoa

American Samoa is a vastly underrated tropical destination that will delight you with its magnificent mountain ridges, wonderfully peaceful bays, soporific villages, and some of the world's most remote, uncluttered and utterly beautiful reefs and beaches. Once you land on the main island, Tutuila, it takes very little effort to look beyond the imported Americana of its main settlement, Pago Pago, to the shadows cast by the spectacular peaks crowding around the deepwater harbour, the forest-lined roads switchbacking over isolated mountain passes, and palm-shaded beaches that paradoxically empty the mind but fill the imagination. The locals also help you to acclimatise to this relaxing habitat by encouraging you to sing along to their favourite tunes on the crowded island buses, welcoming you repeatedly in the streets, and spinning out traditional stories on long, humid evenings.

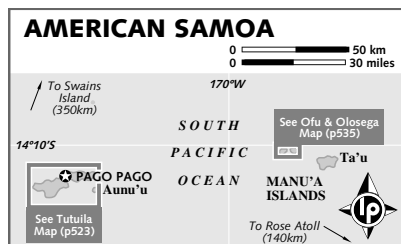
Setting foot on one of the virtually untouched strips of sand in the outlying Manu'a Islands will further seduce your senses. Few experiences compare to the feeling you get when you emerge from the superb, coral-filled waters off Ofu Beach and look up to see nothing but turquoise waters, sea birds crisscrossing the faces of enormous cliffs, and the hulking silhouette of Ta'u way off in the oceanic distance. Hardly anything disturbs the peace and quiet here except for the occasional barking dog and passing pick-up truck – otherwise, there's only the movement of wind and water to ruffle the calm.

Whether you're a hiker keen on checking out some of the highest sea cliffs in the world on Ta'u, a history buff wanting to see your first star mound, or a leisure-seeker with a deep appreciation of beach life, you'll be glad you visited this unsung paradise.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Realise you have the entirety of **Ofu Beach** (p534) to yourself
- Stride along Tutuila's mountainous spine to the top of **Mt Alava** (p525)
- Snorkel and swim off pristine **Alega Beach** (p528)
- Hike across wild **Aunu'u** (p528)
- Fly to remote Ta'u to explore the **National Park of American Samoa** (p535)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit American Samoa is during the dry season from May to October. A less comfortable time to arrive is during the region's wet season between November and April. That said, most rainfall occurs at night and the main discomfort (excepting the odd cyclone) is caused by higher levels of humidity. The exception is the harbour area of Tutuila, where the famous Rainmaker Mountain ensures that the surrounding area receives over 5000mm of precipitation annually. For more climate information, turn to p827.

If you intend visiting the islands around December–January, remember that this is the peak holiday period for Samoan expats living in the USA, Australia and New Zealand (NZ). Book flights well in advance.

HISTORY

Prehistory

Archaeological finds near the villages of Tula and Aoa at the eastern tip of Tutuila, and at To'aga on Ofu, reveal that the islands have been inhabited for more than 3000 years. In terms of mythology, many Samoans believe

that Manu'a was the first land to emerge at the hands of the god Tagaloa. The Tu'i Manu'a (paramount chief of the islands) was held in high esteem by Samoans, and was likely revered as the sovereign of all Polynesia. Although various conflicts ultimately split the islands, the paramount chief was still a proud and powerful figure at the time of cession to the USA at the beginning of the 20th century.

European Contact

In 1722 Dutchman Jacob Roggeveen sighted the Manu'a Islands, but sailed on without landing. In May 1768 the French explorer Captain Louis-Antoine de Bougainville bartered with the inhabitants of the Manu'a Islands, but merely sighted Tutuila. The first expedition to set foot on Tutuila was headed by Frenchman Jean-François de Galaup, comte de la Pérouse, who landed at Fagasa in 1787. The encounter had a tragic finish, with the French and the Samoans fighting each other at A'su: 12 sailors and 39 villagers were killed, and A'su was christened Massacre Bay (see p529).

US Military Rule

A Samoan civil war in the 1870s and 1880s was co-opted by the USA, Britain and Germany into an argument over which foreign power should rule the islands. By the time the tropical dust had settled, control of western Samoa had been granted to Germany and, by 1900, the islands of eastern Samoa had been formally annexed to the USA by a deed of cession signed by all local chiefs. Eastern Samoa became a naval station under the jurisdiction of the US Department of the Navy. In exchange, the USA agreed to protect the traditional rights of indigenous Samoans. The inhabitants acquired the status of US nationals but were denied a vote or representation in Washington.

In 1905 the military commander of Tutuila was given the title of governor and the territory officially became known as American Samoa.

Increasing Democracy

Until the 1960s American Samoa retained its traditional social structure and subsistence economy. But under the orders of President John F Kennedy, American Samoa was swiftly modernised, with European-style

BEST EATING

American Samoa has an obvious fondness for artery-clogging US-style fast food such as burgers and steaks, but fresh seafood and island-grown produce is not hard to track down. The following are Lonely Planet's top four eating experiences in American Samoa:

- Tisa's Barefoot Bar (p532) is a waterfront institution that will put a smile on your face and on your stomach after you chew through one of their fabulous, freshest-of-fresh dinners.
- There's no finer place than the outside deck of the Pago Pago Yacht Club (p532) to munch on cheap, fresh seafood, drink a cold Vaillima beer and watch one of Pago Pago's frequent storms blow in from beyond Rainmaker Mountain.
- Take your hearty, home-cooked meal and a refreshment from Va'oto Lodge (p537) across the airstrip and down to the hammock idly rocked by ocean breezes on one of beautiful Ofu's most stunning stretches of beach.
- Enjoy the spectacle of a traditional, high-energy Samoan song-and-dance routine before gorging yourself on a lavish buffet at Sadie's Restaurant (p532).

homes replacing traditional *fale* (houses with thatched roof and open sides), electrification, and the construction of the Rainmaker Hotel, an international airport and tuna canneries.

Between 1967 and 1975 American Samoans voted, in a series of referenda, for direction by appointed governors. A subsequent referendum determined that they were ready for democratically elected leadership and some measure of autonomy. In 1980 American Samoans were allowed, for the first time, to elect a nonvoting delegate to serve in the US House of Representatives.

Recent Decades

In January 1987 the territory was hit by cyclone Tusi, one of the worst storms in recorded history. The Manu'a Islands were particularly hard hit. To compound matters, cyclones Ofa and Val ploughed through the area in early 1990 and late 1991. Then, in late 2005, the eye of the massive tropical

storm Olaf passed right over the islands. For more on tropical cyclones, see p61.

THE CULTURE

More than any other Polynesian people, Samoans have maintained their traditional way of life in their sauna of a climate, and still follow closely the social hierarchies, customs and courtesies established long before the arrival of Europeans.

For a profile of the Samoan psyche and a description of the Samoan lifestyle, see the cultural detail provided in the Samoa chapter (p480).

Population

American Samoa has a population of about 63,500, most of whom live on the main island of Tutuila. The territory has a high population growth rate, but this is offset by emigration to Hawai'i and mainland America. Some 1500 foreigners reside in American Samoa, most of whom are Koreans or Chinese involved in the tuna or garment industries. About one third of this number are *palagi* (Westerners) who hold government jobs, usually in the teaching or health fields.

ARTS

American Samoa shares its artistic traditions with Samoa, from the energetic song-and-dance routines called *fiafia* and the satirisation of their elders by village youth in the skit-based *Faleaitu* (meaning 'House of Spirits'), to the breezy architecture of the *fale*, intricate *pe'a* (male tattoos) and *malu* (female tattoos), and the lovely *siapo* (bark cloth) and *ie toga* (fine mats) used in customary gift exchanges. For more on these, see the Arts section of the Samoa chapter (p482).

LANGUAGE

For an overview of the pronunciation of the Samoan language, and some introductory words and phrases, see the Language section of the Samoa chapter (p483).

ENVIRONMENT

Geography

American Samoa has a total land area of 197 sq km. The main island, Tutuila, is 30km long and up to 6km wide. The Manu'a group, 100km east of Tutuila, consists of the islands of Ta'u, Ofu and Olosega, all wildly steep and beautiful examples of volcanic remnants.

AMERICAN SAMOA FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Pago Pago (Tutuila)
- **Population:** 63,500
- **Land area:** 197 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 1-684
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** Samoan, English
- **Greetings:** *Talofa*; *Malo* (informal)
- **Website:** www.amerikasamoa.info

The easternmost part of the territory is tiny Rose Atoll, two minuscule specks of land (plus a surrounding reef) comprising a US national wildlife refuge. The refuge exists primarily to protect the green turtle, as well as the extremely rare hawksbill turtle. Only scientific research expeditions are currently allowed to visit the atoll.

Equally tiny Swains Island is situated 350km north-northwest of Tutuila and consists of a 3.25-sq-km ring of land surrounding a brackish lagoon. Both culturally and geographically it belongs to Tokelau (a NZ territory north of the Samoas), but in 1925 the island's owner, the Jennings family, persuaded the USA to annex Swains Island as part of American Samoa.

Ecology

The wild inhabitants of American Samoa includes two species of flying fox, *pili* (skinks), *mo'o* (geckos), and the harmless *gata* (Pacific boa) snake which is found only on Ta'u. The surrounding waters are home to pilot whales, dolphins and porpoises, while hawksbill turtles occasionally breed on remote beaches. Bird species include the nearly flightless banded rail, the barn owl and the superb *sega* (blue-crowned lory). While walking in rainforests, listen for the haunting calls of the rare multicoloured fruit doves (only 50 survive on Tutuila) and the beautiful green-and-white Pacific pigeons.

Tutuila is characterised by broadleaf evergreen rainforest. Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u host temperate forest vegetation such as tree ferns, grasses, wild coleus and epiphytic plants.

TUTUILA

pop 62,000 / area 132 sq km

Pago Pago's incredible harbour, dominated by breathtaking cliffs and verdant slopes, exemplifies the natural beauty you'll find throughout American Samoa's main island. The serpentine coastline of Tutuila is punctuated by truly lovely coves and bays where you can snorkel, swim and snooze in blissful solitude, while the island's sharp central ridge rises to some impressive peaks. Hike along a summit trail high above Tutuila's centrepiece harbour, trek across the rugged satellite islet of Aunu'u, sink down on the warm sand of an uncluttered beach, or let one of the colourful local buses spirit you with chaotic aplomb from one end of this stunning island to the other.

ORIENTATION

Tutuila's one main road follows the twisty coastline from Fagamalo in the island's northwest to Onenoea in the far northeast, a distance of 50km. Several narrower paved roads connect this road with outlying villages, particularly those along the heavily eroded north coast. Heading southwest from Pago Pago along the coastal road, you soon reach Nu'uuli, a loosely defined commercial area along the main road between Coconut Point and the airport turn-offs. South of Nu'uuli is another commercial area called Tafua. The island's highest point is Matafao Peak (653m).

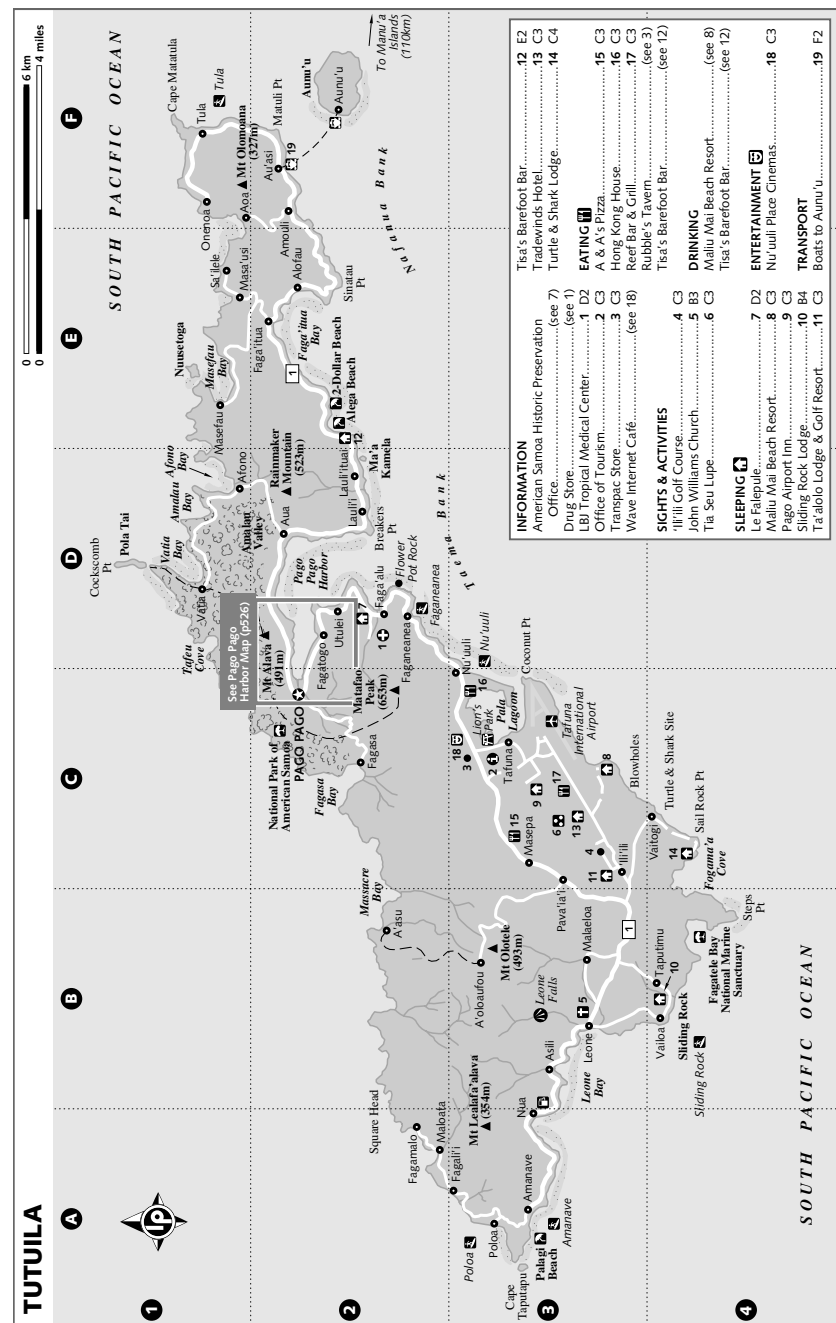
TUTUILA IN...

Two Days

Breakfast early at **DDW** (p532), then hike up **Mt Alava** (p525). Visit the **Jean P Haydon Museum** (p525), enjoy an afternoon of swimming at **Alega Beach** (p528), and stay overnight at **Tisa's Barefoot Bar** (p531). The next day, lose yourself in the wild interior of **Aunu'u** (p528) before heading west to the **Turtle & Shark Site** (p529) and **Cape Taputapu** (p530). Finish the day with dinner at **Evie's Cantina** (p533).

Four Days

It's easy to double your itinerary. Hikers can continue from Mt Alava to beautiful Vatia in the **National Park of American Samoa** (p527), or walk to **Massacre Bay** (p529). Marine enthusiasts should visit **Fagatele Bay** (p529), while budding archaeologists can visit **Tia Seu Lupe** (p528). Whatever happens, have a drink at **Pago Pago Yacht Club** (p533) with its superb sightline to **Rainmaker Mountain** (p527).



Maps

The Office of Tourism distributes a reasonably up-to-date *American Samoa* map (free) with a plan of Pago Pago on one side.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Iupeli Siliva Wesley Bookshop (Map p526; ☎ 633 2201; Pago Pago) Has some Samoa history and culture titles, plus mass-market paperbacks.

Transpac Store (Map p523; ☎ 699 9589; Nu'uuli) Sells a range of Samoa-focused books.

Internet Access

DDW (Don't Drink the Water; Map p526; ☎ 633 5297; Pago Pago)

Feleti Barstow Public Library (Map p526; ☎ 633 5816; Pago Pago) Obtain a temporary library card to access the Internet in the 2nd-floor Computer Lab. Alternatively, pay US\$5 to access the computers for a single day.

Wave Internet Café (Map p523; ☎ 699 7077; Nu'uuli Place Shopping Center, Nu'uuli)

Medical Services

Drug Store (Map p523; ☎ 633 4630; Faga'alū; ☎ 7.45am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) A well-stocked pharmacy.

LBJ Tropical Medical Center (Map p523; ☎ 633 1222-9; Faga'alū; ☎ emergency 24hr) This centre provides basic medical services.

Money

There are no banks or moneychangers at the airport, so bring some US dollars with you.

ANZ Amerika Samoa Bank (Map p526; ☎ 633 1151; Pago Pago) Has an ATM here, at Pago Plaza, and inside the Tradewinds (p532).

Bank of Hawai'i (Map p526; ☎ 633 4226; Centennial Office Bldg, Utulei, Pago Pago) Has an ATM.

Post

Post office (Map p526; Pago Pago) Travellers should have mail addressed to themselves care of General Delivery, Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799.

Tourist Information

American Samoa Historic Preservation Office

(Ashpo; Map p523; ☎ 633 2384; www.ashpo.org; Matafao) Excellent contact for those intrigued by Samoan history. The office is 400m north of the turn-off to the LBJ Tropical Medical Center.

National Park Visitor Information Center (Map p526; ☎ 633 7082; www.nps.gov/npsa/home.htm; Pago Plaza, Pago Pago; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Very helpful place, with info on the National Park of American

Samoa and walking trails. The NPS (National Park Service) runs a homestay programme (www.nps.gov/npsa/home-stay/index.htm) where visitors are put in touch with villagers who offer accommodation. Options have become limited in recent years, but there are still a couple of possibilities around Vatia on Tutuila, and on Ta'u. The cost averages around US\$40 per day, including meals.

Office of Tourism (Map p523; ☎ 699 9411; www.amerikasamoa.info; Tafuna; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Pick up the excellent *A Walking Tour of Historic Fagatogo*.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR

International flights arrive at Tafuna International Airport, 15km southwest of Pago Pago Harbor. For full details of such flights, see p540.

Inter-Island Airways (in Pago Pago ☎ 699 7100, in Ofu 655 7100, in Ta'u 677 7100; www.interislandair.com) services the 30-minute route between Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. Flights between Tafuna International Airport on Tutuila and the tiny airstrip on Ofu cost from US\$140 return; ditto flights between Tafuna and the airstrip on Ta'u.

BOAT

The **American Samoa Inter-Island Shipping Company** (☎ 633 4707) operates a boat called the *Manu'a Tele*, which departs Pago Pago for the Manu'a Islands on Wednesday at 10pm; the trip takes eight hours and costs US\$35 one way (plus US\$5 per piece of luggage). Buy tickets from 8am on the day of departure.

The **MV Sili** (☎ 633 5532) departs Pago Pago for the Manu'a group every second Friday at 10pm. One-way tickets cost US\$20, plus US\$1 per piece of luggage, and ticketing/check-in takes place between 8am and 4pm on the day of departure.

Both the *Manu'a Tele* and the *MV Sili* depart from the dock near the Fono in Pago Pago (see Map p526). Ask each company about pick-up times from Ofu and Ta'u.

For details of boat services to Aunu'u, see the section on that island (p528). For info on the boat service between Tutuila and 'Upolu in Samoa, see p540.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Buses between Pago Pago Harbor and Tafuna International Airport are marked

'Tafuna', run frequently during the day, and cost US\$1. If arriving at night you'll need to get a cab into Pago Pago (between US\$12 and US\$15). There's a taxi stand just outside the airport entrance.

BUS

Riding Tutuila's colourful 'aiga (extended family) buses – small pick-up trucks modified for public transport and equipped with ear-busting sound systems – is a highlight of a visit to American Samoa. These buses do unscheduled runs around Pago Pago Harbor and the more remote areas of the island from the main terminal at the market in Fagatogo (see Map p526).

Buses regularly head east to Aua (US\$0.75) and Tula (US\$1.25), and west to Tafuna (US\$1) and Leone (US\$1). Less frequently, buses go to Fagasa (US\$0.75), A'olofou on the central ridge (US\$1), Amanave (US\$1.25) and Fagamalo in the far northwest (US\$1.50); a trip to the northwest villages often means disembarking at Leone and catching another bus from there. Buses also head over Rainmaker Pass to Vatia (US\$1.50).

CAR

A 2WD is fine for motoring around Tutuila. Car-hire agencies charge between US\$60 and US\$100 per day. For insurance information, see p541.

Some recommended companies:

Aviss Car Rental (☎ 699 2746; res@avissamoa.com; Tafuna International Airport)

Kokonut Car Rentals (Map p526; ☎ 633 7855; kokonutrentals@yahoo.com; Pago Pago)

Sadie's Car Rentals (Map p526; ☎ 633 5981; sadies@samoatelco.com; Sadie Thompson Inn, Pago Pago)

TAXI

Taxis are plentiful and convenient in Pago Pago, Nu'uuli and Tafune, but are prohibitively expensive for island touring.

PAGO PAGO

pop 5000

Personality-wise, Pago Pago (*pa-ngo pa-ngo*) is both The Beauty and The Beast. The town's more attractive side is represented by its stunning harbour setting – a deep bowl of seawater overlooked by magnificent mountain ridges and peaks – and an authentically Samoan, laid-back air. Its less

attractive side is represented by some sham-bolic buildings, a steady flow of pick-up trucks, and the inhabitants' rather carefree approach to garbage disposal.

Shadowing the harbour's northern shore is a mountain ridge culminating in 491m **Mt Alava** (Map p526). The NPS maintains a 5.5km **hiking trail** (1½ to two hours) that leads from Fagasa Pass along this ridge top, a walk yielding fantastic views of remote Tutuila bays, the island's encircling reef and the deep blue of the South Pacific. On Mt Alava, a metal stairway leads up to a TV transmission tower and the rusted remains of a cable-car terminal; a cable car once ran 1.8km across the harbour from here to Solo Hill. Behind the rest *fale* is a very steep trail (some sections use ladders) leading 4km down to Vatia.

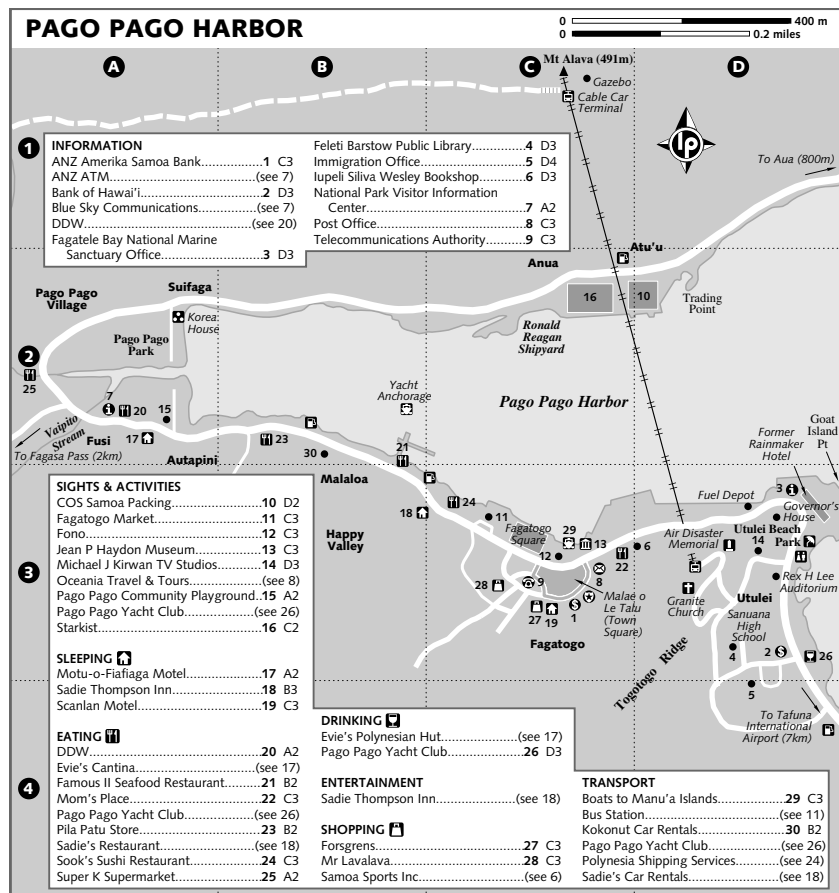
The **Fagatogo market** (Map p526) becomes the town's social centre on Friday night, when Samoans come here to gossip, ransack food stalls, and browse freshly arrived coconuts, breadfruit and other produce. By Saturday, all the good stuff is gone and the market is hushed for another week.

Interested parties can take a free, 30-minute tour of the **Michael J Kirwan TV Studios** (Map p526; ☎ 633 4191), which pioneered the broadcasting of lessons to school students during the frenetic modernisation of American Samoa in the 1960s. Nowadays the studios produce programmes for KVZK, the government-run station. Call at least a day ahead for an appointment.

The **Jean P Haydon Museum** (Map p526; ☎ 633 4347; admission free; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) is a small, untidy exhibition of old Samoan artefacts, but it's still a fascinating place to visit. Among the interesting displays here are *va'a* (bonito canoes) and *alia* (war canoes), coconut-shell combs, pigs' tusk armlets and native pharmacopoeia, plus information on traditional tattooing.

Near the museum is the **Fono** (legislature), a distinctively Samoan architectural grouping. Those interested in attending the law-making sessions held here in January and July should drop by or call the **Office of the Senate Legislature** (☎ 633 5231).

A far less salubrious place is the north shore of the harbour, which is dominated by two enormous tuna canneries: **Starkist** (Map p526; ☎ 644 4231) and **COS** (Map p526; ☎ 644 5272). If you want to discover the source of the pungent smells that occasionally waft



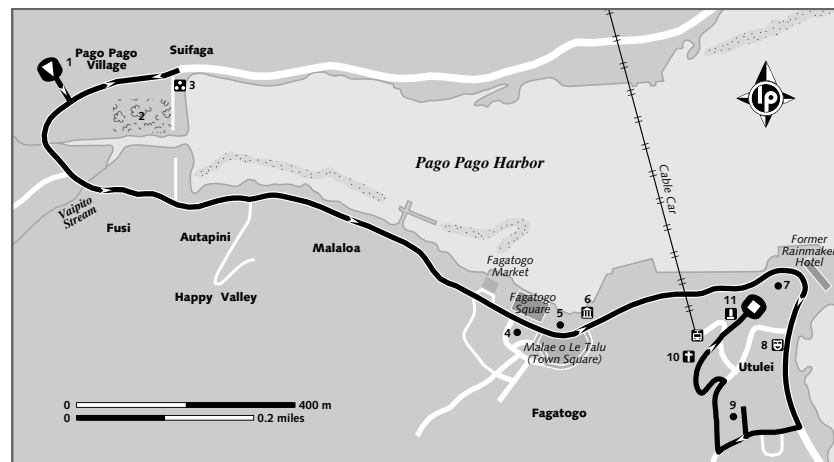
over Fagatogo, take one of the free guided tours offered by both companies. Tours last around 45 minutes and must be arranged at least 48 hours in advance.

Walking Tour

Start your walking tour in **Pago Pago village (1)**, the village that gave its name to the entire harbour area. At the head of the harbour is a large reclaimed area called **Pago Pago Park (2)**, where there's a football field. **Korea House (3)** was built as a social centre for Korean fishers but was gutted by fire in 1997 and is now just an eerie husk.

Double back around the head of the harbour and march east to the attractive colonial-style **courthouse (4)**, built in 1904,

which today houses the territory's High Court. Continue east past the **Fono (5; p525)** and the **Jean P Haydon Museum (6; p525)** until you're almost opposite the old Rainmaker Hotel, where you can climb a ragged stone staircase to see how the renovation of the **Governor's House (7)** is progressing. Continue around the point to the **Rex Lee Auditorium (8)**, where concerts and other events are regularly held, and then browse the **Feleti Barstow Public Library (9; p524)**. To check out the strikingly odd **granite church (10)** with the iron bell and cross that sits halfway up the hill behind the library, follow the road around the back of the Office of Samoan Affairs, climb up one of the flights of stone stairs and wind your way up the narrow streets. Continue



WALK FACTS

Start Pago Pago village

Finish Monument

Distance 3km

Duration 1½ hours

north along this road to the **monument (11)** on Solo Hill commemorating a plane crash in 1980 that resulted in eight deaths. On a cautionary note, we encountered a large pack of dogs near Solo Hill and recommend care be taken. For more on four-legged threats to walkers, see the boxed text, p528.

RAINMAKER MOUNTAIN

Also known as Mt Pioa, 523m-high Rainmaker Mountain (Map p523) is the culprit that traps rain clouds and gives Pago Pago Harbor the highest annual rainfall of any harbour in the world. From afar it looks like a single, large peak, but a drive up Rainmaker Pass for close-up views reveals that the summit is actually three-pronged. The mountain and its base area are designated a national landmark site due to the pristine nature of the tropical vegetation on the slopes.

NATIONAL PARK OF AMERICAN SAMOA

The territory's sole national park, created in 1988, protects pristine landscapes on Tutuila, as well as on Ofu and Ta'u in the

Manu'a Islands; for details of the park's Ofu section, see p535; for info on the Ta'u section, see p535. Significant sections of coral reef also fall within the park's tropical boundaries. Get info from the helpful National Park Visitor Information Center (p524).

The 1000-hectare Tutuila section of the national park (Map p523) is in the north-central part of the island between the villages of Fagasa and Afono. The NPS hiking trail (p525) that leads up Mt Alava and then down to Tutuila's north coast via Vatia presents a wonderful way to experience the park's lowland and montane rainforests, its thriving birdlife, and the wonderful peacefulness that permeates it.

From Aua, a surfaced road switchbacks steeply up over Rainmaker Pass and down to Afono and Vatia. Between these two villages is the beautiful, secluded **Amalau Valley** (Map p523), home to many forest bird species and to two rare species of flying fox. Stop at the lookout point just past the western side of Amalau Bay for some wonderful views.

Vatia (Map p523) is a peaceful village situated on a lovely, coral-fringed bay. At the mouth of the bay is a tiny islet called **Pola Tai** (Cock's Comb; Map p523) that has magnificent, sheer, 120m-high cliffs populated by sea birds. For a close-up of soaring rocks and birds, drive through the village and park at the school, then walk 300m to reach the wonderfully isolated beach at the base of the cliffs.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND?

Aggressive dogs are more than a passing nuisance on Tutuila. They are often frightening and sometimes downright dangerous, particularly when in a large pack. We were given conflicting advice by locals on how to deal with menacing dogs. When we were bailed up by two canines outside a house in Utulei, we were advised not to stop or to wave anything at them, but to just slowly and calmly walk on our way. Other locals told us never to turn our back on any dog and to wave a big stick at them if they approached.

Perhaps the best advice we received was to imitate the behaviour that dogs have been conditioned by locals to be afraid of. Sometimes this involves pretending to throw a rock at the dog (or actually throwing it if the animal doesn't get the message). Samoans also make a clucking noise with their tongues or a shhing noise out of the corners of their mouths to tell dogs to move on.

EASTERN BEACHES

Alega Beach (Map p523), a short drive east of Pago Pago, is a lovely stretch of sand that gets crowded with Samoan bodies on the weekend. It's not only a great place to swim and snorkel (check currents and conditions with locals first), but is also overlooked by Tisa's Barefoot Bar (p533), the perfect spot for a cold drink. You can waive the access fee for the beach (US\$5) by simply buying a drink at Tisa's.

Just east of Alega Beach is shallow **2-Dollar Beach** (Map p523). No prizes for guessing the access fee.

MASEFAU & SA'ILELE

A cross-island road leads from the village of Faga'itua up over a pass before winding slowly down to Masefau, one of those villages that look too idyllic to be anything but a mirage.

Back at the pass, a turn-off to the right takes you down a narrow, potholed road to Sai'ilele, which has one of the island's loveliest beaches: coconut palms are anchored into the sand by mounds of rocks and coral fragments, and the water is placid. The sandy area below the large rock outcrop at the beach's western end provides an excellent place for a picnic.

AUNU'U

pop 600 / area 3 sq km

The tiny, tangled confines of Aunu'u are perfect for a day of roaming and exploring on foot. Actually, there's no other choice, as the island doesn't have any vehicles. Walking tracks often disappear into the undergrowth, so take a guide with you (US\$5 is a reasonable fee for a tour of the island).

At the north end of the island is **Pala Lake**, a dead-looking expanse of quicksand whose fiery red hue is best appreciated at low tide. Within Aunu'u's central volcanic crater lies **Red Lake**, filled with eels and suffused by a preternatural glow at dusk. On the island's eastern shore is rough-and-tumble **Ma'ama'a Cove**, a rocky bowl constantly pounded by large waves. Legend says that this is the site of Sina ma Tigila'u (Sina and Tigila'u), two lovers who were shipwrecked here. You can make out bits of crossed 'rope' and broken 'planks' embedded in the rocks.

Below the western slope of Aunu'u's crater are the **Taufusitele Taro Marshes**, which are planted Hawaiian-style with swamp taro.

Small launches head to Aunu'u from the dock at Au'asi (see Map p523). If you catch a boat with other villagers, you pay US\$1 each way. If you have to charter a boat, be prepared to pay around US\$10 for the return trip. Boats don't run on Sunday.

MATAFAO PEAK

Keen climbers will want tackle the island's highest point, 653m-high Matafao Peak (Map p523). The narrow, unrelentingly steep and very rough trail (three to four hours one way) starts opposite the beginning of the Mt Alava walk; look for the metal ladder. Needless to say, only very experienced hikers/climbers should attempt this trail. It's highly recommended that you organise a guide in Fagasa village.

TIA SEU LUPE

The **American Samoa Historic Preservation Office** (Ashpo; Map p523; ☎ 633 2384; www.ashpo.org; Matafao) maintains a well-preserved ancient Polynesian star mound, *tia seu lupe* (literally

'earthen mound to catch pigeons'; Map p523), near the Catholic cathedral at Tafuna. The mound has a unique connecting platform and fine views of Matafao Peak. Call Ashpo to ask about a personalised tour of the site.

TURTLE & SHARK SITE

The most famous of Tutuila's legends is set in the picturesque village of Vaitogi, in the island's southeast. According to just one of the myriad versions of this legend, an old blind lady and her granddaughter jumped into the sea after being turned out of their village during a time of famine. When their family learned what they'd done, they went to the shore, guilt-ridden, and called the pair by name. A turtle and shark appeared, and the family knew that their relatives had been miraculously transformed in the water and were OK.

Even if the turtle and shark have taken the day off, you'll enjoy the rugged character of the place (Map p523), with its black lava cliffs, heavy surf and blowholes. Don't swim here though, as this is a sacred site; also, the currents are treacherous.

FAGATELE BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

One of the least-visited parts of Tutuila is also one of the island's most spectacular. Fagatele Bay (Map p523), a submerged volcanic crater, is fringed by Tutuila's last remaining stretch of coastal rainforest and its cliff-side depths contain 200 species of coral. It's also visited by numerous turtle species and, between August and November,

by migrating southern humpback whales. With these marvellous natural assets, it's little wonder that the bay was designated a marine sanctuary in 1986.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to organise access to Fagatele Bay. At the time of research, there were no dive operators on Tutuila, which left only an expensive boat charter. Contact the **Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary office** (Map p526; ☎ 633 7354; www.fagatelebay.noaa.gov; Pago Pago; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) for an update on access to the bay.

LEONE

The village of Leone welcomed the first missionary to Tutuila in 1832. John Williams subsequently erected the island's first **church** (Map p523), garnishing it with three towers, some stunning woodwork and stained glass. Try to attend a service here on Sunday morning, when villagers congregate in their best whites to sing hymns before heading home for a lunchtime banquet.

Between the church and the sea is a monument to Williams.

MASSACRE BAY

A marvellous 4km **hiking trail** (four hours return) leads from the scenic village of A'oloaoufou, high up on the rocky spine of Tutuila, down to A'asu on Massacre Bay (Map p523). Massacre Bay's foreboding name is due to a skirmish between French sailors and Samoan villagers that occurred there in 1787, leaving 51 people dead.

The track begins near the community garden in A'oloaoufou and is apparently

STAR MOUNDS

More than 140 distinctive earthen (sometimes stone) mounds dating back to late prehistoric times have been found scattered across the Samoan archipelago. Dubbed star mounds, the structures range from 6m to 30m in length, are up to 3m high and have from one to 11 raylike projections radiating from their base. Forty of these star mounds have been discovered (though not yet excavated) in Tutuila's east on the road between Amouli and Aoa.

The main theory regarding the star mounds is that they were used for pigeon-snaring, an extremely important sport of chiefs that was traditionally pursued from June through September. Villagers would follow their *matai* (chiefs) into the forest to observe and support competitions.

However, American archaeologists David Herdrich and Jeffrey Clark believe star mounds also served a much more complex function in Samoan society, including being sites for rituals related to marriage, healing and warfare. The archaeologists also believe the star mounds came to reflect the position of the *matai* and the notion of *mana* (supernatural power).

If you're interested in visiting one of these structures, contact the **Ashpo** (Map p523; ☎ 633 2384; www.ashpo.org; Matafao).

maintained (or not, as the case may be) by the sole family residing in A'asu. It's often overgrown, extremely muddy and difficult to navigate, particularly on the climb back up. Hikers should seriously consider hiring a guide in A'oloaoufou (costs between US\$5 and US\$10).

If driving to A'oloaoufou, take the turn-off in Pava'ia'i opposite Gold Star Mart. To get to A'oloaoufou by bus, take a Leone-bound vehicle to Pava'ia'i (US\$0.75) and wait on the corner for one headed up the hill.

CAPE TAPUTAPU

Cape Taputapu is Tutuila's westernmost point and received its name (*taputapu* means 'forbidden') after imaginatively fearful tales about it were spread around by locals who wanted the cape's valuable grove of paper mulberry trees all to themselves. No such taboos prevent modern-day visitors from enjoying the cape's beautiful location.

Just past Amanave is a lovely white-sand beach known as **Palagi Beach** (Map p523); ask for directions in the village store. Beyond Amanave, the road winds around valleys and over ridges to the small villages of Poloa, Fagali'i, Maloata and Fagamalo, revealing spectacular views of the coastline along the way.

ACTIVITIES

Despite the Samoan reputation for inactivity, there are plenty of things to do on Tutuila, including solitary mountain-top hikes, diving and snorkelling in submerged volcanoes, and driving golf balls.

Diving

It's extremely unfortunate that there are currently no dive operators on Tutuila (at the time of research anyway) because there's plenty of great diving here. At the northern and western ends of the island, visibility is excellent and many places have walls of coral that are 18m deep or more. Divers should definitely check out the possibility of plumbing the depths of the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Fishing

The **Pago Pago Yacht Club** (Map p526; ☎ 633 2465; Utulei, Pago Pago) serves as the headquarters for the local game-fishing association. Inquire here about fishing charters.

Golf

Tutuila's **'Ili'ili Golf Course** (Map p523; ☎ 699 2995; 'Ili'ili) is a 'very forgiving' 70-par course with dramatic mountain peaks overlooking it to the north and a view of the South Pacific to the east. Green fees for nine/18 holes are US\$3/4 on weekdays and US\$7/9 on weekends. Club hire costs US\$5.

Hiking

We didn't hear of any organised hiking on Tutuila, but one handy resource for hikers is the **National Park Visitor Information Center** (Map p526; ☎ 633 7082; www.nps.gov/npsa/home.htm; Pago Plaza, Pago Pago; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri). The NPS is responsible for maintaining the exemplary trail linking Mt Alava (p525) with Fagasa Pass and Vatia.

Other prime hiking trails lead to Massacre Bay, up Matafao Peak and around Aunu'u.

Snorkelling & Swimming

There are some great spots for swimming and snorkelling along Tutuila's south coast, including Alega Beach (p528) and Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Bring your own snorkelling gear. Otherwise, your best bet is to buy a snorkel and mask at Samoa Sports Inc (p533).

Surfing

The surfing situation on Tutuila is the same as the diving situation – some great spots, but no operators. Some of the best surfing is found just beyond the reef near **Faganeanea** (Map p523; south of Pago Pago), but if the trade winds are blowing and the tides aren't right, surfing will be impossible. Other breaks worth investigating include those at Poloa and Amanave around Cape Taputapu, and the one at **Sliding Rock** (where Sliding Rock Lodge is located; see opposite).

TUTUILA FOR CHILDREN

Kids will love Tutuila's tropical climate and its delightful diversity of sights. They'll have a wonderful time snorkelling off Alega Beach (p528), scrambling around the wild interior of Aunu'u (p528) and gazing up at the magnificent cliffs of Pola Tai (p527). They'll also get a kick out of the *fiafia* (p533) at Sadie Thompson Inn, and the unique cultural displays in the Jean P Haydon Museum (p525). Take toddlers to the **Pago Pago Community Playground** (Map p526; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat).

Baby-sitters are virtually impossible to find. Quiz your accommodation provider about child-minding options.

TOURS

Ecotour Samoa (☎ 22144; www.ecotoursamoa.com)

This Apia- (Samoa) based company does a seven-day guided tour of American Samoa – including all transfers, meals, accommodation and transport – costing US\$300 per person per day.

Oceania Travel & Tours (Map p526; ☎ 633 1172; oceania@blueskynet.as; 1st fl, Post Office Bldg, Pago Pago) Conducts half-/full-day tours (US\$60/95) of Tutuila.

SLEEPING

There's surprisingly little accommodation in Pago Pago – just a handful of motel/hotel setups. Truth be told, there isn't that much accommodation elsewhere on Tutuila either. The majority of the island's beds are found in hotels and private retreats to the southwest of Pago Pago, in and around the Tafuna district. There's only one place to stay in the island's east, but it's a beauty and offers the only *fale*-style sleeping on Tutuila; see the boxed text, below.

Budget

You may be able to arrange an overnight stay in Vatia through the National Park of American Samoa's homestay programme; for details, see p524.

Scanlan Motel (Map p526; ☎ 633 4451; Pago Pago; s & d US\$30-60; ☎) This authentic backpacker haunt is perfect for those who want to pay as little as possible for a room in pricey

American Samoa. Just be prepared for ultrabasic, ramshackle rooms, most without windows.

Midrange

Motu-o-Fiagia Motel (Evalani's; Map p526; ☎ 633 7777; www.amsamoa.com/evie; Pago Pago; r US\$60; ☎ ☎ ☎) Better known as Evalani's, this idiosyncratic motel has some theatrical interior decoration, probably due to the former stage performer who now runs it. It's a highly hospitable place, with excellent rooms and arguably the best rates on the island. Grab a bite to eat at next-door Evie's Cantina, which moonlights as Evie's Polynesian Hut – a good option for a drink.

Sliding Rock Lodge (Map p523; ☎ 688 7553; www.slidingrockresort.com; Vailoa; r incl breakfast US\$65-85; ☎ ☎) This five-unit lodge is named after a nearby tidal pool that locals slip into at the end of another hot day. The good-standard units are positioned up on a hill and command outstanding views of the surrounding coastline.

Maliu Mai Beach Resort (Map p523; ☎ 699 7232; Tafuna; s/d US\$65/85; ☎ ☎) It calls itself a resort, but Maliu Mai is more like a comfy motel with a large entertaining area where bands and other events are staged. Rooms are modern and nicely fitted out, but the best thing about this place is its location on a stormy little beach. The bar (see p533) gets busy on weekends.

Pago Airport Inn (Map p523; ☎ 699 6333; www.pagoairportinn.com; Tafuna; s/d US\$75/100; ☎ ☎) This inn will suit those who want to dump their suitcases as soon as possible after their flight lands on Tutuila, but the condition of facilities in some rooms does not justify the price tag.

Top End

Le Falepule (Map p523; ☎ 633 5264; lefalepule@samoa.telco.com; Faga'alū; s/d from US\$125/135, st US\$145; ☎ ☎ ☎) Overlooking Faga'alū Bay is this superb B&B. Its excellent modern facilities are embellished by Samoan decorations and a terrific view from the balcony. Rates include breakfast. You'll find it at the end of a steep driveway 200m north of the LBJ Tropical Medical Center turn-off.

Turtle & Shark Lodge (Map p523; ☎ 688 1212, 699 1212; www.turtleandshark.com; Vaitogi; r US\$75-125; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This fine 10-room guesthouse

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Tisa's Barefoot Bar (Map p523; ☎ 622 7447; www.tisasbarefootbar.com; Alega Beach; fale per person incl breakfast & dinner US\$50) This wonderful, environmentally friendly place is run by Tisa and the 'Candyman'. The idiosyncratic bar is fronted by a deck that looks out over lovely Alega Beach. Just off the decking are two *fale*-huts, each gazing toward the ocean and with super-comfortable beds; more accommodation is planned. Breakfast and dinner is supplied by the excellent restaurant (p532). The Candyman can take you on hikes that take full advantage of the beautiful surrounding property.

is located on the same beautiful stretch of coast that gave rise to the Samoan turtle and shark legend (see p529). Plunge into the swimming pool, have a hit on the tennis court, or just breathe in the seclusion.

Ta'alolo Lodge & Golf Resort (Map p523; ☎ 699 7201; taalolo@samoatelco.com; 'lii'ili; r incl breakfast & dinner US\$80-135; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This lovely split-level home is a mere chip shot from the 'Ili'ili Golf Course. Rooms have fridges, DVD players and other modern facilities – there's little reason for you to emerge except to hit the golf course again.

Sadie Thompson Inn (Map p526; ☎ 633 5981; www.sadiethompsoninn.com; Pago Pago; r US\$95-150; ☎ ☎) Debate continues over whether or not the building occupied by this upmarket inn was the same place that the original Sadie Thompson (immortalised in Somerset Maugham's novel *Rain*) set up her red light. Regardless, the dozen or so rooms here are large and well appointed, and on site is Sadie's Restaurant.

Tradewinds Hotel (Map p523; ☎ 699 1000; www.tradewinds.as; Tafuna; r & st US\$135-240; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) For a five-star hotel, Tradewinds has a disappointingly bland interior, and is sited well away from the sea. That said, rooms have a tad more character than the hotel's empty corridors, and facilities are first-rate.

EATING

American Samoa's reputation for fatty fried foods is not generally contradicted by the eateries on Tutuila. (Steak and eggs with a side order of spam, anyone?) However, there are some good restaurants on the island, including a couple of Asian options and upmarket places where the health of your digestive system is actually taken into account. Most places to eat are in Fagatogo and Nu'uuli.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Pago Pago Yacht Club (Map p526; ☎ 633 2465; Pago Pago; meals US\$4-8; ☎ lunch) The town's convivial yacht club not only serves simple burgers and sandwiches at lunchtime, but also great-value meals of freshly caught fish accompanied by vegetables and rice.

DDW (Don't Drink the Water; Map p526; ☎ 633 5297; Pago Pago; meals US\$7-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat; ☎ ☎) This relaxed café gets superbusy at breakfast- and lunchtimes, when local workers stampede through the door to tuck

into well-cooked burgers, omelettes, steaks and tasty cakes.

Mom's Place (Map p526; ☎ 633 1414; Pago Pago; meals US\$4-7; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat; ☎) Mom's rich, diner-style cooking won't help keep your waistline under control, but to hell with it. The burgers here are just too tasty.

Rubble's Tavern (Map p523; ☎ 699 4400; Nu'uuli; mains US\$6-24; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Despite its name, this place has no connection to the Flintstones other than the dinosaur-sized steaks that appear on your plate. Carnivores will be in paradise here, but avoid it if you're a vegetarian.

A & A's Pizza (Map p523; ☎ 699 9428; Nu'uuli; pizzas from US\$12, meals US\$2-5; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Such is the Samoan appetite that they don't bother serving 'small' or 'regular' pizzas here – sizes start at 'medium'. This business has merged with a Filipino eatery called Pinoy's, so Asian noodle dishes and stews are also served.

Restaurants

Tisa's Barefoot Bar (Map p523; ☎ 622 7447; Alega Beach; meals US\$12-18; ☎ 11am-7pm, by reservation after 7pm) The food at this beachside institution is just superb, with vegetarians well catered for. You must book ahead for dinners (two days in advance to guarantee use of the freshest produce). On Wednesday night there's an *umu* (stone oven; US\$30), where traditional Samoan fare is given an international twist.

Sook's Sushi Restaurant (Map p526; ☎ 633 5525; GHC Reid New Bldg, Pago Pago; mains US\$8-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎) This one-room Japanese restaurant offers a welcome respite from burgers and eggs. Try the tasty sushi, sashimi and tempura dishes, or the Korean *kalbi* (ribs).

Famous II Seafood Restaurant (Map p526; ☎ 633 1159; Pago Pago; meals US\$8-17; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎) 'Famous' might be overstating it, but the Fagatogo branch of this small Tutuila chain does make excellent soups and other Chinese meals, and seafood-lovers can't complain about the Saturday night buffet (US\$20).

Sadie's Restaurant (Map p526; ☎ 633 5981; Pago Pago; lunch US\$11-20, dinner US\$15-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) The spacious, quiet interior of Sadie's is a good place to escape the crowds that normally throng Pago Pago's cafés, and

to indulge in some good seafood offerings. Vegetarians will usually find something palatable here.

Evie's Cantina (Map p526; ☎ 633 4776; Pago Pago; mains US\$8-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat & Sun) Attached to the Motu-o-Fiafiaga Motel, this cavernous Mexican restaurant serves big, tasty burritos, enchiladas and other cheese-soaked treats. Grab a booth and watch your stomach bulge once the food arrives.

Reef Bar & Grill (Map p523; ☎ 699 7717; Tafuna; meals US\$7-20; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) As you'd expect from a place called The Reef, lots of seafood appears on the menu here, including a fine Samoan *oka* (marinated raw fish). This sizable restaurant sits across the Cost U Less car park.

Hong Kong House (Map p523; ☎ 699 8983; Nu'uuli; mains US\$7-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun; ☎) Very good Chinese food is on offer in this open-plan restaurant, including soups, and beef, chicken and seafood dishes. There's a small selection of tofu and other vegetarian meals.

Self-Catering

Get fresh produce at Fagatogo's Friday night market (p525). Other options for self-caterers:

Pila Patu Store (Map p526; Pago Pago; ☎ 24hr) Sells canned goods, snacks and drinks around the clock.

Super K Supermarket (Map p526; Pago Pago; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat) A well-stocked option.

DRINKING

Samoans and expats alike enjoy the occasional (OK, make that regular) drink. Bars at top-end hotels tend to be uniform, drab affairs. Try some of the following places for real local character.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pago Pago Yacht Club (Map p526; ☎ 633 2465; Pago Pago) From the outside deck of the yacht club, there's a magnificent sea-level view of Rainmaker Mountain. If you're seated out there just as water-swollen clouds blow in from the northeast, you'll actually see the rain drops marching across the surface of the harbour and climbing up the foreshore to smack down on the yacht club roof. Expat yachties love to gather here and gab while clutching cold beers.

Tisa's Barefoot Bar (Map p523; ☎ 622 7447; Alega Beach) Want to escape the dishevelled Pago Pago streetscape? Tisa's driftwood bar is the perfect place to rest your elbows and wash your throat while gazing out over some typical Polynesian beachfront beauty.

Evie's Polynesian Hut (Map p526; ☎ 633 4776; Pago Pago) At meal times, this establishment masquerades as Evie's Cantina (left), a Mexican eatery. But the oval bar dominating one end of the room and the lack of windows reveal its true personality – a drinking den that hosts DJs on Friday and Saturday nights.

Maliu Mai Beach Resort (Map p523; ☎ 699 7232; Tafuna) Come down to Maliu Mai in the evening and drag a chair and a drink onto the sand. On clear nights, you can see Matafao Peak silhouetted by the glow of Pago Pago's lights.

ENTERTAINMENT

Organised entertainment on Tutuila is mainly provided by the local cinemas and an exuberant group of Samoan singers and dancers.

Fiafia

Sadie Thompson Inn (Map p526; ☎ 633 5981; Pago Pago; US\$20) A *fiafia* is held here on Thursday night. It's very popular, so book ahead for a place at the buffet.

Cinemas

Nu'uuli Place Cinemas (Map p523; ☎ 699 9334; Nu'uuli; adult/child US\$6.50/4) This two-screen cinema hosts the latest-release commercial flicks.

SHOPPING

High-quality crafts are hard to come by on Tutuila, but you can stock up on good-value *lava-lava* (wraparound sarongs), sporting goods and Samoan crooners.

Forsgrens (Map p526; ☎ 633 5431; Pago Pago) This local shopping institution gets trampled in the late afternoon by Samoans who come to ransack its racks of T-shirts and *lava-lava*.

Samoa Sports Inc (Map p526; ☎ 633 4075; Pago Pago) This is your best bet for snorkelling, fishing and golfing gear, should you require it.

Mr Lavalava (Map p526; ☎ 633 7061; Pago Pago) Mr Lavalava sells handicrafts and a good selection of Samoan CDs. Staff recommend the greatest hits of Aniseto (Seto) Falemoe.

MANU'A ISLANDS

pop 1500 / area 65 sq km

Anchored about 100km to the east of Tutuila are three of the most remote and beautiful islands you could hope to encounter in the Pacific. Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u may be separate islands, but their environments all share the same marvellous characteristics: enormous cliffs sheltering sea-bird colonies; expired volcanic cones; undisturbed beaches that flow into lagoons stocked with a brilliant array of coral; and a sense of timelessness that makes watches completely redundant. The Manu'a Islands make the laid-back environs of Tutuila seem just about chaotic by comparison, so when you visit, pack plenty of extra reading material and a willingness to fall asleep in the middle of the day.

INFORMATION

Ofu village has a bank near the wharf and a basic medical clinic. The only post office on Ofu-Olosega is in Olosega village.

The sleepy village of Fiti'uta on Ta'u has several stores selling basic supplies, as well as a post office and a bank.

AND GOD CREATED SAMOA

Samoans claim their land is the 'cradle of Polynesia', a place created by the sky god Tagaloa (Tangaroa). Before the sea, earth, sky, plants or people existed, Tagaloa lived in the expanse of empty space. He created a rock, commanding it to split into clay, coral, cliffs and stones. As the rock broke apart, the earth, sea and sky came into being. From a bit of the rock emerged a spring of fresh water.

Next, at Sava in the Manu'a Islands, Tagaloa created man and woman, whom he named Fatu and 'Ele'ele ('Heart' and 'Earth'). He sent them to the region of fresh water and commanded them to people the area. He ordered the sky, which was called Tu'ite'elagi, to prop itself up above the earth.

Tagaloa then created Po and Ao ('Night' and 'Day'), which bore the 'eyes of the sky' – the sun and the moon. At the same time he made the nine regions of heaven, inhabited by various gods.

In the meantime, Fatu and 'Ele'ele were 'peopling the area'. Tagaloa, reckoning that all these people needed some form of government, sent Manu'a, a son of Po and Ao, to be the people's chief. The Manu'a Islands were named after this chief, and from that time on, Samoan kings were called Tu'i Manu'a tele ma Samoa 'atoa (King of Manu'a and all of Samoa).

Next, the countries were divided into islands or groups of islands. The world now consisted of Manu'a, Viti (Fiji), Tonga and Savai'i. Tagaloa then went to Manu'a and noticed that a void existed between it and Savai'i. Up popped 'Upolu and then Tutuila.

Tagaloa's final command was: 'Always respect Manu'a; anyone who fails to do so will be overtaken by catastrophe'. Thus, Manu'a became the spiritual centre of the Samoan islands and, to some extent, of all Polynesia.

TRANSPORT Getting There & Away

AIR

Ofu's airport is a 500m surfaced strip at Va'oto, squeezed in between the sea and mountains. On Ta'u, there's an airport at Fiti'uta.

For details of Inter-Island Airways flights between the Manu'a Islands and Tutuila, see p540.

BOAT

For information on boat services between the Manu'a Islands and Tutuila, see p540.

Getting Around

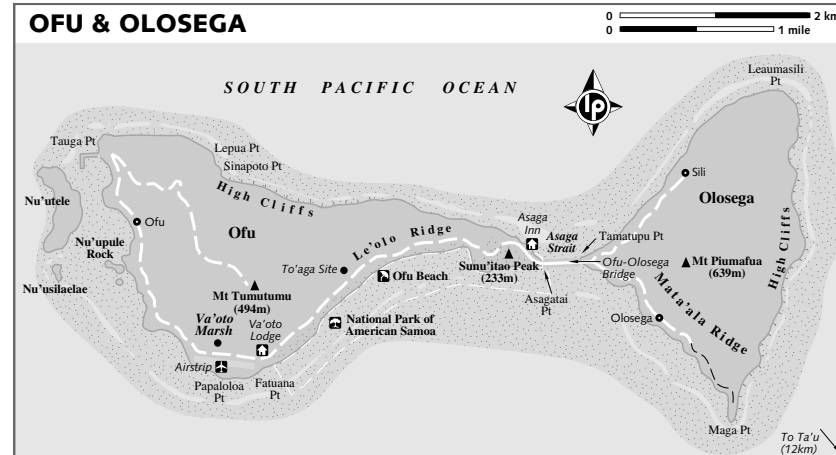
There are no established plane or boat services between individual Manu'a islands. Getting around on the islands themselves involves walking or sticking your thumb out. There's a small number of vehicles on the islands and few drivers will pass a walker without offering a lift.

OFU

pop 400 / area 5.2 sq km

Ofu is the most fêted of the Manu'a Islands mainly because of the exquisite beach on its southern shoreline. **Ofu Beach** (Map p535) is a natural marvel – 4km

OFU & OLOSEGA



of shining, palm-fringed white sand. The strip of beach stretching from 500m past Va'oto Lodge (p537) to the beginning of the bridge connecting Ofu to Olosega, plus 140 hectares of offshore waters, comprise the Ofu section of the **National Park of American Samoa** (Map p535). The reef off Ofu Beach is considered to be one of the few healthy, intact reefs in all the Samoas.

Behind Ofu Beach is the **To'aga site** (Map p535), where in 1987 archaeologists found an unprecedented array of artefacts, ranging in age from the earliest times of Samoan prehistory to modern day. The excavations have been filled so there's nothing to actually see here. Samoans believe the area of bush between the road and the beach is infested with devilish *aitu* (spirits or ghosts).

The 5.5km-long, often indistinct track (five hours return) to the summit of **Mt Tumutumu** (494m; Map p535) begins just north of Ofu village wharf and twists up to the TV relay tower atop the mountain. It's possible to climb this tower to get the full view, but a large rock on the summit is an equally handy viewpoint.

OLOSEGA

pop 300 / area 3 sq km

Olosega shares the same marvellous encircling reef system as Ofu. The two islands look conjoined, but are separated from each other by the 137m-wide Asaga Strait. Local kids regularly jump off the cyclone-proof

bridge (Map p535) that crosses the strait, letting the current carry them to shore. Before attempting this yourself, make sure you assess the water's depth and the strength of the current.

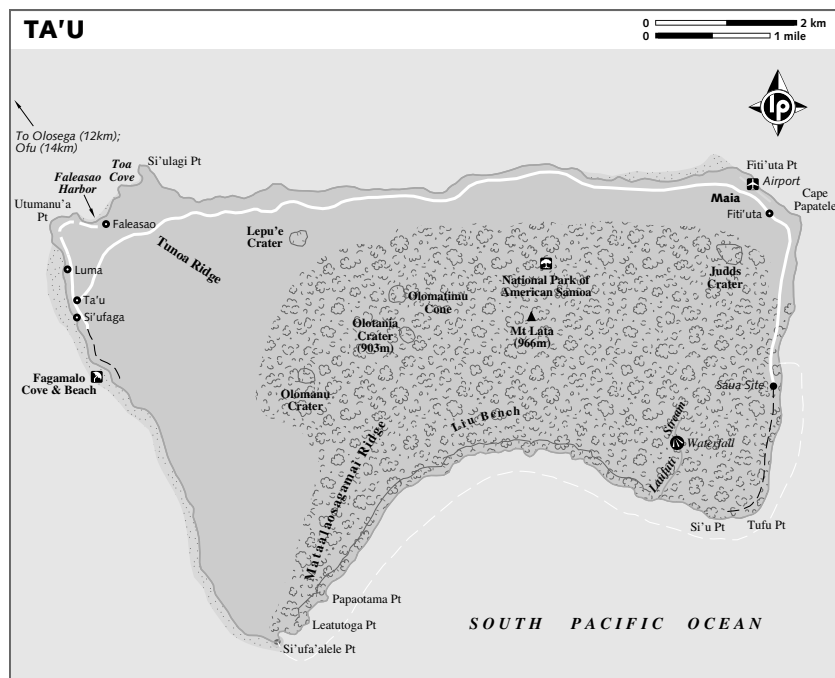
The 1.5km walk from Olosega village up to **Maga Point** (Map p535) on the island's southern tip is a highlight of a visit. The point's steep cliffs, the reefs marching out from the shore, and the view of distant Ta'u and the Pacific horizon are simply unforgettable. To avoid local dogs, veer around Olosega village on the beach. After passing the rubbish tip, pick your way along the coral-strewn beach and look for the narrow trail that climbs up the hillside.

TA'U

pop 800 / area 39 sq km

On the dramatic south coast of this remote, sparsely populated island, some of the highest sea cliffs in the world rise 966m to Mt Lata, the territory's highest point. Much of Ta'u is covered in dense rainforest and dotted with inactive cones and craters. If you do venture out here, you'll invariably have the island's marvellous forests, volcanic remnants and numerous bird species mostly to yourself.

The Ta'u unit of the **National Park of American Samoa** (Map p536) occupies 2160 hectares of land and 400 hectares of offshore waters. Its lowland and montane **rainforests** are home to flying foxes and numerous native **birds**, including black noddies, white



terns, multicoloured fruit doves and the revered *lupe* (Pacific pigeon). Ta'u is also the only habitat of the Pacific boa.

About 2.5km from Fiti'uta is the legendary **Saua site** (Map p536), where Tagaloa is said to have created the first humans before sending them out to Polynesia (see the boxed text, p534). Only volcanic boulders, wild surf and a windswept beach mark this very sacred place.

The main settlement on Ta'u consists of the villages of Ta'u, Luma and Si'ufaga in the island's northwest. It was in **Luma** that the young Margaret Mead researched and wrote her classic anthropological work, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, in 1925.

ACTIVITIES

Walkers will adore the Manu'a Islands. On Ofu they can tackle Mt Tumutumu (p535), while Olosega offers the wonderful walk up Maga Point (p535). The three-hour climb to **Judds Crater** (Map p536) in Ta'u's northeast is best done with a local guide. Hikers can also follow a rough track down the east coast to Tufu Point, and from there

hike 2km to the waterfall at **Laufuti Stream** (Map p536); anyone going beyond Si'u Point should take a guide. Another good walk on Ta'u is the one heading south from Ta'u village to secluded **Fagamalo Cove** (Map p536).

If you plan to go hiking anywhere in the Manu'a Islands, first contact the **National Park Visitor Information Center** (Map p526; ☎ 633 7082; www.nps.gov/npsa/home.htm; Pago Plaza, Pago Pago; ☎ 7.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) on Tutuila.

For snorkelling, you just can't beat the stunning reef off **Ofu Beach** (p534).

SLEEPING & EATING

There are only two accommodation options in the Manu'a group, both on Ofu. However, you may be able to arrange accommodation on Ta'u through the National Park of American Samoa (see p524).

Asaga Inn (Map p535; ☎ 655 1164, 655 1306; s/d US\$40/60; ♿) Located beside the Ofu–Olosega bridge. It was damaged by hurricane Olaf at the beginning of 2005 but has since reopened. The guesthouse has four comfortable rooms and meals are available.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Va'oto Lodge (Map p535; ☎ 655 1120; vaoto@hotmail.com; s/d US\$35/70; ♿) This must be one of the few places in the world where you can watch planes take off through your bedroom window. It's set off a paradisaal beach where you can snorkel in a coral lagoon undisturbed by rips. Hearty (nontraditional Samoan) meals are prepared (US\$15 for three meals) and beer and other drinks are available. There are 10 big basic units facing the ocean here, each with a bathroom and firm beds. Bring plenty of insect repellent as the mosquitoes are vicious.

There are basic stores in Ofu and Olosega villages.

AMERICAN SAMOA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Fale accommodation for tourists has never quite caught on in American Samoa. Instead, beds are almost all found in generic motels, hotels and a handful of B&B establishments.

The sleeping options listed in this chapter are given in order of author preference – leading each section are the places our author recommends the most. In American Samoa, budget accommodation peaks at US\$50, midrange places charge between US\$50 and US\$100, and top-end facilities levy over US\$100.

The National Park of American Samoa operates a village homestay programme; for details, see p524.

ACTIVITIES

For full details of where and how you can undertake the following activities (as well as fishing and golfing), see the Activities sections for Tutuila (p530) and the Manu'a Islands (opposite).

Diving

Corals are prolific and underwater visibility is excellent at the northern and western ends of Tutuila, as well as in Fagatele Bay. However, at the time of research, American

Samoa had no dive operators and getting out to these dive sites was extremely difficult. Get an update on this situation from the territory's **Office of Tourism** (Map p536; ☎ 699 9411; www.amsamoa.com, www.amerikasamoa.info; Tafuna, Tutuila).

Hiking

The high rocky ridges and cliffs that are the most prominent feature of American Samoa's islands afford some spectacular hiking. However, only a couple of trails on Tutuila are regularly maintained. The condition of the rest depends on the severity of recent storms and whether any villagers have bothered to clear a way through. For these reasons, local guides are highly recommended; on Ta'u in the Manu'a group, they're a necessity and tend to nominate a high fee with this knowledge in mind.

Wear long trousers due to the trailside thorns and sharp grasses that will slice unprotected skin. Sturdy walking shoes are also essential. A big stick is another useful piece of hiking gear, used to dissuade village dogs. Also carry plenty of insect repellent, sunblock, water and snacks.

Snorkelling & Swimming

In Pago Pago itself, there's a beach at Utulei where the locals swim. But although pollution levels have dropped in recent

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Samoa News* (US\$0c) is published daily Monday to Saturday, while the *Samoa Post* (US\$0c) is published on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.
- The main radio stations are Radio KHJ 93FM and Radio KSBS (FM 92.1). The government-owned TV station, KVZK, broadcasts Channel 2 (local programmes, noncommercial USA fare) and Channel 4 (commercial US programmes).
- The video format used is NTSC.
- USA-style plugs are used in American Samoa (110V, 60Hz AC).
- American Samoa uses the American version of the imperial system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

years, the town's harbour definitely isn't the cleanest swimming spot on the island. In general, snorkelling is safe on the north side of the island in winter when the trade winds blow in from the southeast, and on the southern coast in summer when winds come from the north. However, shallow reefs, pounding surf and the swift movement of water through breaks in the *ava* (reefs) make much of the coastline of American Samoa treacherous. Always seek local advice on the best places to swim, and never swim or snorkel alone.

Surfing

According to those in the know, the surf in American Samoa is (or was) one of the best-kept secrets of the South Pacific. Powerful 2m waves breaking in very shallow water over very sharp coral, however, make it an activity only for the very experienced. Bring all your own surfing gear to American Samoa.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks open from 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday (some branches open Saturday between 8.30am and 12.30pm). Shops operate from 8am to 4.30pm on weekdays and from 8am to noon on Saturday, though village stores keep longer hours. Eateries serve breakfast and lunch between 8am and 4pm, and dinner from 6pm to 10pm. Bars in the main towns often open for drinking around lunchtime and often close at midnight. Government offices open from 9am to 5pm.

We don't give opening hours for establishments mentioned in the text unless they differ greatly from the standard hours outlined in this section.

For details about Samoan public holidays, see p829.

CHILDREN

The sunny tropical climate enjoyed for much of the year by American Samoa – with the possible exception of rain-harassed Pago Pago – emboldens children to make the most of the islands' beaches, warm waters and lush valleys. There are few natural threats to the health of children here, but note that walking trails and beaches are entirely unsupervised.

See Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children* for advice on family travel.

See the Tutuila for Children section (p530) for suggestions on how to keep kids occupied during your visit. For details of the practicalities concerning children visiting the South Pacific, see p826.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

All American Samoan diplomatic affairs are handled by the USA. There are no consulates or embassies in American Samoa and currently no places that are able to issue visas for the USA.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

American Samoa's main public holiday is Flag Day (17 April), which commemorates the raising of the US flag over the islands in 1900 with an arts festival and much traditional fanfare. In May there's National Tourism Week, which is meant to attract international visitors to the islands but seems to have had a low profile in recent times. Far more vivacious is Tisa's Tattoo Festival in October, the inaugural version of which took place in 2005 at Tisa's Barefoot Bar on Tutuila. Also in October (on the second Sunday of the month) is White Sunday, when kids get to celebrate themselves.

INTERNET ACCESS

Tutuila's handful of top-end hotels and guesthouses allow guests to connect their computers to the Internet. There are also a couple of Internet cafés in Pago Pago (see p524), which charge around US\$13 per 15 minutes.

INTERNET RESOURCES

American Samoa Historic Preservation Office

(www.ashpo.org) This site includes information about the office and its aims, along with a good walking tour.

National Park of American Samoa (www.nps.gov/npsa/home.htm) This excellent site has information on the park's homestay programme and local flora and fauna.

Office of Tourism (www.amerikasamoa.info/) A good site on American Samoa, with information on history, language and customs, and a calendar of events.

Samoa News (www.samoanews.com) For the latest American Samoan news.

MAPS

The University of Hawai'i's *Islands of Samoa* map (US\$4) has good topographic detail of the territory, but dates from 1990. It's usually available from the **Iupeli Siliva**

Wesley Bookshop (Map p526; ☎ 633 2201) in Pago Pago.

The US NPS publishes a handy free map and guide to American Samoa. It's available from the **National Park Visitor Information Center** (Map p526; ☎ 633 7082; www.nps.gov/npsa/home.htm; Pago Plaza, Pago Pago).

MONEY

The US dollar, divided into 100 cents, is the unit of currency in use in American Samoa. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. In this book, unless otherwise stated, all prices given are in US dollars.

ATMs

Automated teller machines are provided by the ANZ Amerika Samoa Bank and the Bank of Hawai'i on Tutuila in both Pago Pago and Tafuna.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected or encouraged in American Samoa. It is, however, deemed acceptable for exceptional service at finer restaurants.

TELEPHONE

The **Telecommunications Authority** (Map p526; ☎ 633 1121; Pago Pago) of American Samoa handles local and international calls. Local calls cost US10c. Station-to-station calls to the US mainland and Hawai'i cost US\$6 for the first three minutes and US40c for each minute thereafter, with evening and

weekend discounts. To Australia, NZ and the Pacific, the charge is US\$5.70 for the first three minutes and US\$1.10 thereafter. Calls to Europe cost US\$8 for the first three minutes and US\$1.60 thereafter.

Mobile Phones

Hire phones or buy SIM cards for use in GSM 900-compatible phones from **Blue Sky Communications** (Map p526; ☎ 699 2759; Pago Plaza, Pago Pago).

Phone Codes

The country code for Samoa is ☎ 1-684. The territory has no area codes.

Phonecards

Phonecards are usually available for US\$5, US\$10 and US\$20, though cardphones are virtually nonexistent outside of Pago Pago, Tafuna and Nu'uuli.

TIME

The local time in American Samoa is Greenwich Mean Time/Coordinated Universal Time (GMT/UTC) minus 11 hours. Therefore, when it's noon in American Samoa, it's 11pm the same day in London, 3pm the same day in Los Angeles, and 9am the following day in Sydney.

VISAS

US citizens equipped with a valid passport and an onward ticket can visit American Samoa visa-free. Nationals of the following countries equipped with a valid passport and an onward ticket will receive a free one-month visa on arrival: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Federated States of Micronesia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, NZ, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Nationals of all other countries must apply in advance for their one-month visa (US\$40).

Visa extensions are handled by the **Immigration Office** (Map p526; ☎ 633 4203; www.asg.gov.net/LEGAL%20AFFAIRS.htm; ground fl, Executive Office Bldg, Utulei; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri), located within the Department of Legal Affairs in Pago Pago. Visas can only be extended by one month (US\$50) and you must be sponsored by a resident.

HOW MUCH?

- **Restaurant meal:** from US\$7
- **Night in a midrange hotel:** from US\$60
- **Nine holes of golf in Tutuila:** from US\$3
- **Day tour of Tutuila:** US\$95
- **Car hire:** from US\$60 per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon of unleaded petrol:** US\$2.96
- **1L of bottled water:** US\$1.50
- **355mL bottle of Vailima beer:** US\$2.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$5 to US\$7
- **Samoa pancakes:** US\$1

TRANSPORT IN AMERICAN SAMOA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There's no better illustration of the physical isolation of American Samoa than the fact that you can only fly direct to Tutuila from Apia (Samoa) and Honolulu (Hawai'i). It's for this reason that many visitors tie a trip to this far-flung US territory to an exploration of Samoa and/or other South Pacific destinations.

Direct flights between Pago Pago and Honolulu start from around US\$580 from Honolulu with Hawaiian Airlines. From Samoa, you can fly to Pago Pago with Inter-Island Airways and Polynesian Airlines from around US\$180 one way; for information on flights to Samoa from outside the Pacific, see p516.

Visitors fly in to Tafuna International Airport, 15km southwest of Pago Pago Harbor on Tutuila. Airlines that service American Samoa include the following (telephone numbers listed here are for dialling from within American Samoa):

Hawaiian Airlines (www.hawaiianairlines.com)

Inter-Island Airways (☎ 699 7100; www.interislandair.com)

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 699 9126; www.polynesianairlines.com)

Sea

FERRY

A car ferry called *Lady Naomi* runs between Pago Pago and Apia once a week. It departs Pago Pago each Thursday at 3.30pm for the seven-hour trip. The return deck/cabin fare from American Samoa is US\$75/100. Tickets must be purchased at least one day in advance from **Polynesia Shipping Services** (Map p526; ☎ 633 1211; Pago Pago).

YACHT

During the region's dry (and cyclone-free) season between May and October, yachts cruise all around the South Pacific. Pago Pago's deep, spectacular harbour serves as the official entry point for private yacht owners.

Yachts should be granted free anchorage in the harbour for the first week of their

stay, but are liable for a monthly rate after that. The rate depends on the length of the yacht but is usually between US\$12 and US\$30. Vessels arriving from Hawai'i will need to present a US customs clearance document from Honolulu.

The **Pago Pago Yacht Club** (Map p526; ☎ 633 2465; Utulei, Pago Pago) is where yachties hang out and share information, usually out on the deck with a Vailima beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Inter-Island Airways (in Pago Pago ☎ 699 7100, in Ofu 655 7100, in Ta'u 677 7100; www.interislandair.com) services the 30-minute air route between Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. Flights between Tutuila and Ofu cost from US\$140 return, as do flights between Tutuila and Ta'u. Services are frequently cancelled due to unsafe cross-winds at the Manu'a airstrips.

Bicycle

Tutuila is not very conducive to a cycling tour. The island is mountainous, traffic can be heavy, and a complete circuit is impossible since there are no roads across the rugged north coast. Dogs can also be a major hassle here. You could conceivably take a bike over to the Manu'a Islands by boat, but the minimalist road networks of these islands make this a rather dubious plan.

Cyclists heading to American Samoa should come prepared for the almost incessant heat and humidity, and should bring their own repair kits, spares, a good lock and heavy-duty panniers.

Boat

The **American Samoa Inter-Island Shipping Company** (☎ 633 4707) operates a cargo vessel called the *Manu'a Tele*, which departs Pago Pago for the Manu'a Islands on Wednesday at 10pm; the trip takes eight hours. Passengers pay US\$35 one way, plus US\$5 per piece of luggage. Tickets are only sold from 8am on the day of departure; the boat operator's waterfront kiosk is otherwise unmanned. This boat is a good option for divers who want to transport tanks to the Manu'a Islands, which they cannot do by plane.

The **MV Sili** (☎ 633 5532) also chugs between Pago Pago and the Manu'a group. It departs

Tutuila every second Friday at 10pm and one-way tickets cost US\$20 (plus US\$1 per piece of luggage); tickets are sold between 8am and 4pm on the day of departure. This boat doesn't enter Manu'a harbours – rather, you transfer to a smaller boat at the harbour entrance.

Ask each operator about pick-up times from Ofu and Ta'u.

Bus

Villages and towns on the island of Tutuila are serviced by 'aiga-owned buses. The vehicles – modified pick-up trucks with deadly sound systems – theoretically run until early evening, but don't try to test this theory out after 2pm on Saturday, or on Sunday after church services are finished. All buses display the name of their final destination in the front window. To stop a bus, wave your hand and arm, palm down, as the bus approaches. To signal that you'd like to get off the bus, either knock on the ceiling or clap loudly. Pay the fare to the driver; try to have the exact fare.

Details of routes and fares are given on p525.

Car

Hiring a car allows you to explore Tutuila quickly and comfortably via the island's good sealed roads. That said, complete reliance on a hire car will rob you of the unique cultural experiences that can be gained on public transport.

At the time of writing, motorcycles were not available for hire in American Samoa.

DRIVING LICENCE

A valid foreign driving licence should allow you to drive in American Samoa, though you can always get yourself an international driving licence to be absolutely certain.

HIRE

When hiring a vehicle, check for any damage or scratches before you get into the car and note everything on the rental agreement, lest you be held liable for damage when the car is returned.

For details of car-hire firms on Tutuila, see p525.

INSURANCE

It's essential to have your hire car covered by insurance, as repair costs are extremely high. Several local car-hire firms offer contracts where there's no option of accepting a CDW (collision/damage waiver). The lack of a CDW technically means that the car hirer is liable for *all* costs resulting from an accident, regardless of whose fault it is, so sign such contracts at your peril. You should insist on a CDW, for which you pay an extra fee of around US\$8 to US\$10 per day.

ROAD RULES

Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road. The speed limit is 32km/h (20mph) through villages and 55km/h (35mph) outside populated areas.

Local Transport

TAXI

Taxis on Tutuila are expensive and are only convenient for short trips.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Solomon Islands

The Solomons remains an undiscovered gem for adventure travellers, divers and those seeking an authentic Melanesian experience. Coral islands encircle huge lagoons, volcanoes bubble away underwater, locals practise magic and summon sharks. It's not a glamour destination, as there's little tourism infrastructure, but that keeps the crowds down.

This is a famous dive destination, thanks to the wealth of coral reefs, exciting underwater topography and hundreds of sunken WWII wrecks. It's a wonderful spot for snorkellers, too, and anglers will find the waters full of opportunities for sport and game fishing.

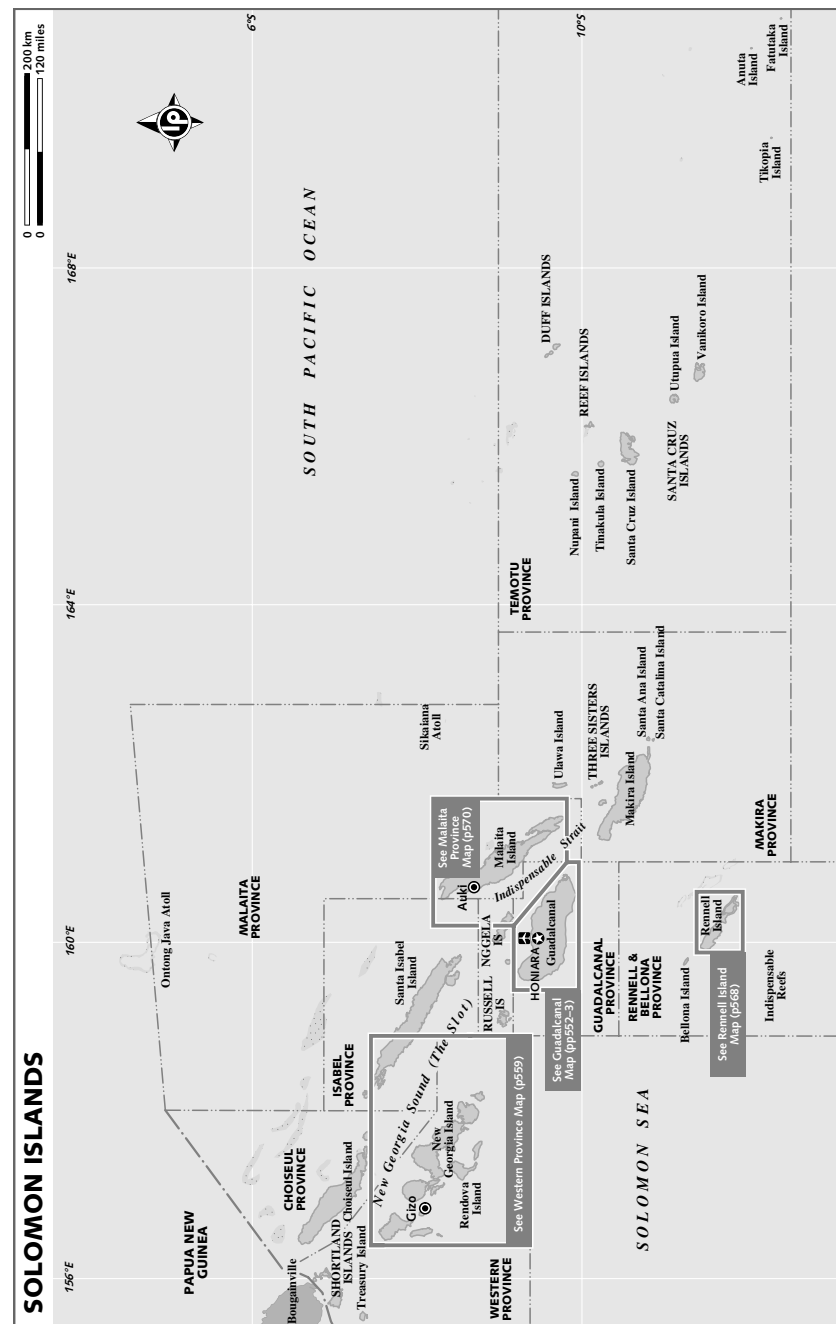
Some of the islands are large, with mountain interiors and fast-flowing rivers, while others are tiny atolls in stunning lagoons. The archipelago is the South Pacific's third largest and most of its people live a subsistence lifestyle that has barely changed for centuries.

It's hard to believe that until the 1930s these friendly, easy-going islanders were considered to be among the world's most violent and dangerous people. Head-hunting, cannibalism and skull worship were central elements of traditional culture, and sacred skull shrines remain as macabre and fascinating reminders of the old days.

Unfortunately, more recently the Solomons developed a dangerous reputation following the period of ethnic conflict in 1999 and 2000. In the ensuing years Guadalcanal and – to a lesser extent – Malaita experienced a major breakdown in law and order. The deployment of a regional assistance mission quickly re-established law and order, and it's now perfectly safe to travel anywhere in the Solomons except for rural Guadalcanal...and even there you can get around if you have a guide or officer to lead the way.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the wilds of **Malaita** (p569), staying in villages and visiting artificial islands and shark worshippers
 - Skip across the surface of stunning **Roviana Lagoon** (p560) in an open boat, stopping over sunken WWII wreckage to dive and snorkel
 - Hang out in **Gizo** (p559), surfing at Pailongge's excellent reef-breaks in warm crystal-clear waters free from surf-rage and eating out at **PT 109** (p561)
 - Relax and dive around **Lola Island** (p563), visiting a nearby skull shrine and ruins of a head-hunter king's coral fort
 - Paddle a traditional canoe and watch wildlife in the huge World Heritage-listed **Lake Te'Nggano** (p567)
- 
- A map of the Solomon Islands archipelago. Four locations are marked with black stars and labeled: Gizo (on the western coast of Guadalcanal), Lola Island (off the northern coast of Guadalcanal), Malaita (in the northern part of the archipelago), and Lake Te'Nggano (on the island of Bougainville, to the north of the main group of islands).



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

From late May until early December (the dry season) southeasterly winds produce pleasantly mild weather. Rainfall is light and rain periods are usually several days apart.

From mid-December to mid-May, monsoon winds come from the west or north-west bringing the wet season – a time of higher temperatures, humidity and rainfall. Short, sharp, torrential rains are followed by bright sunshine. Honiara's annual rainfall is about 215mm, which is drier than most of the rest of the country. Some areas, such as Guadalcanal's south coast, receive as much as 12.5m of rain! Cyclones can blow up between January and April.

Daytime coastal temperatures vary through the year from 27°C to 32°C. At night the temperature falls to around 19°C. The humidity can be oppressive and is highest in the morning, regularly reaching 90%.

The most comfortable time to visit the Solomons is between June and September, although humidity levels are lowest from October to December. The surfing season is from October to April.

HISTORY

Papuan-speaking hunter-gatherers from New Guinea were settling the southern and eastern Solomon Islands by 25,000 BC. They were the only inhabitants for thousands of years, until Austronesian-speaking proto-Melanesians began moving in around 4000 BC. The Lapita people (see p39) appeared between 2000 and 1600 BC.

Most people lived in small villages on tribal lands, practising shifting cultivation, fishing, hunting, carving, weaving and canoe building. Rule was by *kastom* (custom) as recalled by clan elders, ancestors were worshipped and blood feuds, head-hunting and cannibalism were common.

Polynesians from the east settled the outer islands such as Rennell, Bellona and Ontong Java between AD 1200 and 1600, and their settlements suffered raids from Tongans between the 14th and 18th centuries.

Spanish Exploration

Spaniard Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra left Peru with two ships in November 1567. On 7 February 1568 he saw and named Santa Isabel, and settled there. On 11 August, after

SOLOMON ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Honiara (Guadalcanal)
- **Population:** 538,000
- **Land area:** 27,540 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 677
- **Currency:** Solomon Islands dollar (\$S)
- **Languages:** 74 indigenous languages, plus Solomons Pijin (English is widely spoken)
- **Greeting:** *Halo* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.visitsolomons.com.sb

six months of conflict, the voyagers set sail for Peru.

Mendaña returned almost 30 years later in 1595 with four ships and 450 would-be colonists. He came upon and named Santa Cruz, and established a settlement before dying there of malaria. After two months the settlement was abandoned and the survivors limped back to Peru.

Mendaña's chief pilot from 1595 was the Portuguese Pedro Fernández de Quirós, who left Peru with three small ships on 21 December 1605 and reached the Duff Islands early in 1606.

Further Exploration & Early Trading

There was almost no further contact with Europeans until 1767, when the British Captain Philip Carteret came upon Santa Cruz and Malaita.

British, French and American explorers followed, and whalers began arriving in 1798. Sandalwood traders visited from the 1840s to late 1860s, buying pigs, turtle shell, pearl shell and *bêches-de-mer* (lethargic, bottom-dwelling sea creatures). The sandalwood traders were notoriously cruel (see p46) and from the 1860s firearms traded with sailors produced an explosive growth in head-hunting and slave raids; the diseases the Europeans carried also caused thousands of deaths. At this time missionaries were active elsewhere in the South Pacific, but they moved cautiously in the Solomons, which became known as the most dangerous place in the region. As resentment towards European

treachery and diseases grew, a number of missionaries were murdered.

The Protectorate

In the 1890s about 50 British traders and missionaries were present in the Solomons, and Germany was active in New Guinea, the Shortlands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Ontong Java. On 6 October 1893 Britain proclaimed a protectorate over the archipelago's southern islands, which was extended in 1897 and again in 1898. Charles Morris Woodford became the first resident commissioner in 1896. In 1899 Britain relinquished claims to Western Samoa, and in return Germany ceded the Shortlands, Choiseul, Ontong Java and Santa Isabel to Britain.

Missionaries sought to eradicate local culture, declaring customs and ceremonies to be evil. Sorcery and head-hunting diminished, but islanders continued to die in huge numbers from European diseases. Between 1871 and 1903 blackbirders (slave traders) took 30,000 men from the Solomons to work in the cane fields of northern Australia and Fiji (see p46). Blackbirding was eventually outlawed and some islanders returned to the Solomons years later, bringing cloth and rifles.

The Kwaio Rebellion on Malaita in 1927 was a rejection of European values (see below). In 1928 several Kwaio rebels were hanged in the then-capital, Tulagi. Basiana, the defiant rebel leader, declared before his

death, 'Tulagi will be torn apart, and scattered to the winds', and 14 years later it was destroyed during WWII.

WWII

In April 1942 the Japanese seized the Shortland Islands. Three weeks later Tulagi was taken and the Japanese began building an airstrip on Guadalcanal.

United States troops landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942. In the early hours of 9 August, while landings were in progress, a Japanese naval force left Rabaul in New Guinea to attack the US transports at Red Beach before they unloaded. This, the Battle of Savo, was one of the US navy's heaviest defeats – 1270 Allied sailors were lost.

The US forces gradually gained the upper hand, but at a tremendous cost of life on both sides. After six months the Japanese withdrew to New Georgia. During the Guadalcanal campaign, six naval battles were fought and 67 warships and transports sunk – so many ships were sunk off the northern coast of Guadalcanal that this area is now called Iron Bottom Sound. Around 7000 American and 30,000 Japanese lives were lost on land and at sea, many of them to disease.

As 1943 progressed, more islands were recovered by the Allies and by the year's end only Choiseul and the Shortlands remained in Japanese hands. The Allies recovered them after the Japanese surrender in 1945.

Postwar to the Present Day

Tulagi was gutted during the war and the Quonset-hut township of Honiara replaced it as the capital. The economy was in ruins.

A proto-nationalist postwar movement called Marching Rule (Ma'asina Ruru) sprang up in Malaita, opposed to cooperation with the British authorities, whose rule had been restored after WWII. Marching Rule's members were regimented into coastal villages, dependent on community-based agriculture. The movement was also a cargo cult, holding the belief that remaining US forces would deliver goods, so the followers hacked out crude airstrips in the bush for imaginary planes to land, marched in quasi-military formation and shuffled paper on improvised office furniture. Mass arrests by British authorities in 1947 and 1948 caused the movement to wane, and it died out after US forces left in 1950.

THE KWAIO REBELLION

On 4 October 1927 District Officer William Bell was in Kwaio territory (Malaita) to collect tax and confiscate rifles. With him were 14 Malaitan constables. A Kwaio called Basiana killed Bell, and in the ensuing melee all but one of the constables were killed.

The reaction in Tulagi, the capital, was immediate – and excessive. The cruiser HMAS *Adelaide*, dispatched from Sydney, shelled all the villages it could find, gardens were poisoned, and sacred objects were destroyed. The Kwaio claimed that more than a thousand people were killed.

Six Kwaio (including Basiana) were later hanged in Tulagi and 30 others died in jail. This ruthless action subdued the Kwaio but left a long legacy of ill feeling towards government and Europeans.

Britain began to see the need for local government, and a governing council was elected in 1970. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate was renamed the Solomon Islands five years later and independence was granted on 7 July 1978.

In the late 1990s long-simmering ethnic tension between the Gwalese people of Guadalcanal and immigrants from Malaita escalated into violence (see p550). Hundreds of people died, thousands were displaced and the national government was overthrown.

Soon the country's economy was in a shambles: the canneries and the country's only gold mine closed, tourism ground to a halt and the country was surviving on aid donations. Pacific neighbours feared that the Solomons would become a failed state. An election in December 2001 saw Sir Allan Kemakesa become prime minister. Sir Allan oversaw the deployment of Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (Ramsi) troops. The country is now rebuilding.

As we were going to press in April 2006 the first elections held since the Tension installed Snyder Rini as prime minister. This saw widespread rioting in Honiara, and Chinatown and the Pacific Casino Hotel were destroyed. Snyder Rini lasted just eight days (see the boxed text, p555).

THE CULTURE

Solomon Islanders' obligations to their clan and village bigman (chief) are eternal and enduring, whether they live in the same village

all their lives or move to another country. As in most Melanesian cultures, the *wantok* system is observed here (see below).

The National Psyche

There's an enormous sense of relief that things have 'normalised' after the ethnic tension. People are coming back to the Solomons – business and trade are doing better, and the Gold Ridge mine will reopen again soon. People are participating in good faith in the reconciliation process and want to get on with things after years of having to put everything on hold. Anger and cynicism about the political process briefly erupted again in riots in Honiara in April 2006 after a national election (see the boxed text, p555).

Lifestyle

Beliefs, ceremonies, totems and traditional valuables vary between communities, but the Solomon Islands are quintessentially Melanesian (except for a few Polynesian outliers). Melanesian culture is deeply rooted in ancestor worship, magic and oral traditions. Villagers often refer to their traditional ways, beliefs and land ownership as *kastom*; it's bound up in the Melanesian systems of lore and culture (see p50). In Malaita the spirit of a dead person can live in a shark; the shark is thus offered gifts and worshipped.

Most Solomon Islanders live in coastal villages close to freshwater springs. Each family has a few scattered vegetable plots.

THE WANTOK SYSTEM

Fundamental to the Solomons' culture and common to many Melanesian societies is the idea of *wantok*. In Pijin, *wantok* simply means 'one talk', and your *wantok* are those who speak your language – your clan and family. All islanders are born with a set of obligations to their *wantok*, but they're also endowed with privileges that only *wantok* receive.

Within the village, each person is entitled to land and food, and to share in the community assets. Any clans people, whether in Honiara or Hanoi, are expected to accommodate and feed their *wantok* until they can make more permanent arrangements.

For most Melanesian villagers it's an egalitarian way of sharing the community assets. There's no social security system and very few people are in paid employment, but the clan provides economic support and a strong sense of identity.

The *wantok* system affects everything: if you are tendering out a construction project and a *wantok* bids, you give the contract to the *wantok*. If your bus driver is a *wantok*, you won't have to pay. And if you have a *wantok* in the judiciary, maybe you won't go to jail.

In the political and public-affairs arenas, however, the *wantok* system translates as nepotism and corruption. In the Solomons it has undermined democratic institutions and hampered the country's development.

SUP SUP & SHOPPING *Trudy Hairs*

Grocery shopping is probably everyone's least favourite activity, from finding a parking spot to coping with that wonky-wheeled trolley and the anxiety over which queue to choose. Just when you're feeling sorry for yourself, though, spare a thought for the women of the village of Ura in Malaita. Solomon Islands women traditionally grow the food for their family 'in the bush'. Getting the groceries is more than a drag, it's a gruelling hike through some pretty rough terrain. There are forests immediately surrounding Ura, but an injunction from the Solomon Islands High Court over a land dispute involving a teak plantation around their village has meant that women now have to walk up to three hours (return trip) to avoid the disputed land.

With training on new vegetable varieties, seed propagation, pruning and composting as part of the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) project, women in Ura now grow vegetables at their back doors, commonly referred to as *sup sup* or kitchen gardens. They still go 'to the bush' for root vegetables as they have always done, but they go less often now and they have their fresh veg in abundance on their doorstep. It's a small step with big implications, freeing up time for women to participate in skill workshops or community activities or simply to enjoy each other's company.

The Solomon Islands brings new meaning to the concept of isolation. Getting from one side of a province to another is often an expedition, and without access to an outboard motorboat you're not going to get far at all. Malaita, for

example, has just two roads – covering the north of the province only – while in Guadalcanal your Sunday-drive options are limited to around 100km east and west of Honiara. For men and women in the provinces, access to health clinics, markets, education and employment is very limited. There are very few ways to make money, which makes it hard to refuse the money that logging companies offer to access land. In a country where the overwhelming majority of the population relies heavily on natural resources, the long-term consequences can be devastating.

Live & Learn, IWDA and Australian People for Health, Education & Development Abroad (Apheda) facilitate discussion forums centred on these issues where men and women weigh up the short-term benefits against the long-term consequences so that they can make informed choices about their futures. Ura village is part of the AusAID-funded Solomon Islands Capacity and Sustainability Project, implemented by IWDA, Live & Learn and Apheda. The IWDA is an Australian nongovernmental organisation working with women across the Asia-Pacific region to support their efforts to improve their life choices and those of their families and communities, and to advance women's human rights. For more information on IWDA, visit www.iwda.org.au or telephone ☎ 03-9650 5574 in Australia.

Trudy Hairs, an Overseas Program Manager for the IWDA, supplied this boxed text. This piece is a compilation of stories written by IWDA employees while on monitoring visits.

Population

The Solomons' 2005 population was estimated at 538,000. Melanesians represent 94% and Polynesians 4%. The large Micronesian communities who were resettled from Kiribati by the British in the 1960s are still called Gilbertese. The remainder of the population is made up of Asians and expats, mainly Aussies, Kiwis, Brits and Yanks.

The Solomons' population density of 14.5 people per sq km is one of the Pacific's lowest. From the early 1970s until recent times the population increased annually by 3.5%; the rate has now dropped to 2.68%, still among the world's highest. Death and infant-mortality rates are falling, and life

expectancy is now over 70 years (having risen from only 54 in the late 1980s).

About 86% of the population lives in rural villages. Urban drift caused Honiara's population to grow by 7% per year until the ethnic tension of the late 1990s.

RELIGION

About 96% of the population is Christian. Of these, 35% are members of the Anglican-affiliated Church of Melanesia and 20% are Roman Catholics.

Islanders still practise pre-Christian religions in a few remote areas, particularly on Malaita; in other places traditional beliefs are observed alongside Christianity.

ARTS Literature

Ples Blong Iumi – *The Solomon Islands, the Past Four Thousand Years*, by Sam Alasia contains contributions by 14 Solomon Islanders. *Zoleveke* – *A Man from Choiseul*, by Gideon Zoleveke, recounts the story of a Choiseul man who became a cabinet minister.

From Pig-Theft to Parliament – *My Life Between Two Worlds*, by Jonathan Fifi'i, tells of the author's childhood in Malaita, the Marching Rule movement and parliamentary life. *Kanaka Boy*, by Sir Frederick Osifelo, is the autobiography of the first Solomon Islander to be knighted.

James Jones' classic *The Thin Red Line* (1963) was been made into the 1998 film starring Sean Penn, George Clooney and Nick Nolte. This grim WWII story is fictional but set in Guadalcanal.

Often very funny and sometimes insightful, *Solomon Time* by Will Randall (2003) tells of a disenchanted English school teacher who spends a year trying to establish a chicken farming business on Rendova.

Music

Solomon Islanders are incredibly musical people – it's a must to go to a local church service to listen to the singing. The local music scene is in its infancy, but a few artists are making names for themselves around the Pacific music scene, including Sharzy, a boy soul singer from Malaita, and 13-year-old protégé David Bogese from Isabel.

The Malaitan pipe bands (or bamboo bands) are amazing. In ensembles of 12 or so members, the band plays bamboo pipes in all sizes bundled together with bushvine. They're played as panpipe and flutes, and as long tubes whose openings are struck with rubber thongs to make an unusual

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Tipa's album *Maiae* (2005) is a classic example of breezy islander sounds fused with modern music and strong multipart vocal harmonies. Traditional string-band elements and percussion are layered with keys, guitars, drums and bass, and fantastic vocal arrangements. The songs are strong with catchy melodies.

NGUZUNGUZU

The *nguzunguzu* (pronounced noo-zoo-noo-zoo) once adorned canoe prows to ward off water spirits, guide the craft through jagged reefs and protect the warriors aboard. The figurehead rests its chin either on two clenched fists (for war), a human head (head-hunting) or on a dove (peace). The best carvings are made of ebony and inlaid with nautilus shell, which make a striking contrast with the smooth, jet-black timber.

Although native to Western Province, the *nguzunguzu* has been taken up as a national symbol and is embossed on the S\$1 coin.

plinketty-plonk sound. Drums and tea-chest basses are sometimes incorporated, as are traditional costumes and energetic dancing. You can see them performing in Honiara's hotels.

Carving

There are strong carving and artefact-making traditions in the Solomons. Once more widespread, pottery is now only produced in northwestern Choiseul.

Carvings incorporate human, bird, fish and other animal motifs, often in combination, and they frequently represent deities and spirits. Woodcarvings are inlaid with nautilus or trochus shell. Carvings of *nguzunguzu* (canoe figureheads, also carved in miniature; see above) and animals are produced from kerosene wood and ebony (ebony is rare and expensive). Decorated bowls and masks are widely available, as are stone replicas of traditional shell money. 'Riverstone' carvings are popular, too.

Look out for the *kapkap* – a pendant-like disk of open-worked turtle shell on a pale circular shell. It's worn on the forehead of a chief, often seen in archival photos. This is a classic form of traditional valuable that is made as far away as New Ireland in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and all the way down to Makira in the Solomons.

Weaving

Bukaware baskets, trays, table mats and coasters are made in many parts of the Solomons and are woven from the very tough *asa* vine. Gilbertese make sturdy brown

sleeping mats out of the pandanus leaf. Finely woven shoulder bags are produced on Rennell and Bellona.

Tattoos

Tattoos are a traditional art form and their motifs or designs can be indicative of a person's age and social position – for example whether a boy has been initiated. Tattooing is more common among fairer-skinned peoples.

Facial engraving is practised on Malaita; a grooved, unpigmented design is made using a scraper bone against the skin. In northern Malaita men are tattooed below the eye and women decorate their breasts.

Chests are tattooed on the islands of Rennell and Bellona.

Currency

Kastom mani (custom money) is used for paying bride price and other special transactions. Shell money is used in Malaita, while in the Temotu Islands red-feather coils are still used.

LANGUAGE

There are 74 mutually unintelligible indigenous languages in the Solomon Islands, and it's common for people from villages only a few kilometres apart to be unable to understand each other. As a result, islanders who aren't *wantok* communicate in Pijin. Educated people generally speak English so you can get by without learning any Pijin. However, if you try a few words in Pijin you'll find that people lose their shyness.

Lonely Planet's *Pidgin* phrasebook has a large section on Solomon Islands Pijin.

Solomon Islands Pijin basics

Hello.	<i>Halo.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Lukim iu (bihaen).</i>
How are you?	<i>Iu stap oraet nomoa?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Mi stap gudfala (tanggio tumas).</i>
Please.	<i>Plis.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Tanggio (tumas).</i>
Yes.	<i>Ies.</i>
No.	<i>Nomoa.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The Solomons has more than 4500 plant species, including 230 varieties of orchid. Tropical rainforest covers the islands, although

BEST EATING

Although eating in the Solomons is hardly *haute cuisine*, there are opportunities for fine dining. The top-end hotels have good restaurants, but we also recommend the following:

- Try splendid crayfish hotpot or sizzling chilli prawns at PT 109 (p561) in Gizo.
- Thai chicken curry, grilled reef fish and fresh greens, or even just a cocktail at sunset – Fatboys (p561) off Gizo is the hippest bar/restaurant in the Solomons.
- Local oysters at Uepi Island Resort (p566) in Marovo make a great entrée to the superb three-course meals served there. Hard to beat as the Solomons' best.
- Honiara's Fortune Restaurant (p556) is a classy Chinese restaurant that hosts the capital's well-heeled gastronomes.
- Cool milkshakes, great coffees and monster cooked breakfasts at Lime Lounge (p556) in Honiara – an air-con oasis of calm in the crush of the big city.

much of it has been degraded by logging operations. Many plants are still used for building materials, food and medicine.

The spectacular marine environment is home to a rich variety of fish, corals, anemones and many other creatures, including eight species of venomous sea snakes. Several islands are breeding grounds for green and hawksbill turtles.

The Solomons has 173 bird species, 40 of them endemic. Some, such as the Rennell fantail and the slaty flycatcher of Vanikoro, are found only on one island.

Four rat species are larger than domestic cats and other land mammals include the cuscus and flying fox (fruit bat).

Among the lizards are the 1.5m-long monitor lizard, freshwater crocodiles and the very dangerous saltwater crocodile, which can exceed 5m in length.

More than 130 butterfly species are found locally, and 35 are endemic. The two largest forms, the Queen Victoria birdwing and the blue mountain birdwing, have wing spans over 25cm.

Geography

The islands of the Solomons form a scattered double chain that extends 1667km southeast from Bougainville in PNG. The third-largest archipelago in the entire South Pacific, the Solomons cover over 1.35 million sq km of sea. The total land area is 27,540 sq km.

Of the 992 islands, 347 are populated. The largest islands are Guadalcanal (5336 sq km), Malaita (3840 sq km), Santa Isabel (3380 sq km), Choiseul (3200 sq km), Makira (3188 sq km) and New Georgia (2145 sq km). The country's highest peak, Mt Makarakombu (2447m), is on Guadalcanal. There are active volcanoes, and earthquakes are common.

The majority of the islands of the Solomons are fringed with coral reefs and shel-

tered lagoons; many have formed around volcanic cones, while others are former reefs that have been uplifted by volcanic activity. Rennell Island is the most striking example in the South Pacific of a raised coral atoll.

GUADALCANAL

pop 104,000 / area 5336 sq km

The largest island in the Solomons group, Guadalcanal hosts the national capital, Honiara.

Honiara began life as the huge US supply depot that was developed to service the Henderson airstrip between Kukum and Point Cruz in 1943. Since then the capital has spread inland over nearby ridges, many of which were WWII battlefields.

ETHNIC TENSION

For years the Gwale people of Guadalcanal had resented the fact that their traditional land was being gobbled up by outsiders attracted to the economic opportunities in Honiara. Much of their resentment was directed at migrants from Malaita. Not only were the Malaitans seen as land stealers, they also seemed to get all the good jobs.

Resentment and jealousy boiled over in early 1999 when a group of young Gwalese formed the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA). They began to terrorise and kill rural Malaitans who were forced to flee to the capital or back to their home island. The Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) was formed to protect the interests of Malaitans.

The Honiara Peace Accord was brokered in July 1999, but this soon fell apart and fighting resumed. The MEF gained the upper hand in weaponry and eventually took control of the capital, which effectively became a Malaitan enclave. Hundreds of people were killed during the hostilities. The MEF ousted the prime minister in June 2000, and soon after a cabinet minister was assassinated by the GRA (now called the Isatabu Freedom Fighters).

Following mediation by Australia and New Zealand (NZ), the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed in October 2000. A general amnesty was declared and many weapons were handed in.

However, what began as ethnic tension descended into general lawlessness, thuggery and intimidation. Though the conflict was confined to Guadalcanal, 'events' started happening elsewhere – the Western Province government hired former BRA soldiers (from PNG's Bougainville War) for protection after a brazen killing in Gizo and hostile boats entered Marovo Lagoon. The whole country was crippled and traumatised, and the fragile economy collapsed.

On 24 July 2003 the Ramsi, an Australian-led coalition of police from Pacific island states, was deployed to restore law and order. Security was quickly re-established and Ramsi remains in an on-going capacity while the country rebuilds.

Some have decry the Ramsi deployment as neocolonialism on Australia's part. That's bullshit. Support for the operation among Solomon Islanders is unanimous and there's a palpable feeling of relief now that the hostilities are finished.

In an interesting twist, the Malaitans – 23,000 of whom fled Guadalcanal to Malaita (many of whom were third-generation Honiara dwellers with no land to return to) – still control Honiara, though they cannot venture past its city limits. Malaitans are an indomitable force in the Solomon Islands and they've vowed they will burn Honiara in their retreat if they are forced to leave again.

The presence of Ramsi means that the Solomons are safe once more, but it doesn't look like the personnel will be leaving anytime soon.

HONIARA IN...

Two Days

Collect a *Solomons Star* newspaper (S\$5) and slip into the **Lime Lounge** (p556) for breakfast – fresh fruit and yogurt or eggs as you like 'em. Wander through the modest **National Museum & Cultural Centre** (p555) and check out the carvers' shop in the grounds of the Mendana Hotel opposite. Walk 20 minutes up to the **US War Memorial** (p555) in the cool of the morning for commanding views over Iron Bottom Sound. Check out Honiara's **central market** (p557) for brilliant pineapple and watermelon, and buy a length of shell money (S\$50). Catch a bus to **Chinatown** (p555) and stay out of the midday heat in a breezy leafhouse with a cool drink. Later in the day go to the beachfront **Point Cruz Yacht Club** (p556) for a cold Solbrew beer, staying on for a pub-style dinner and perhaps some live entertainment.

On day two, get out of Honiara! Take a day trip by boat out to **Tulagi** (p558) in Central Province for diving or snorkelling and visit the megapode colonies on volcanic **Savo Island** (p558). Back in Honiara, have dinner at the **King Solomon Hotel** (p556) and ride its kooky funicular shuttle.

Since the Tension (see the boxed text, p550) independent travel on Guadalcanal outside the capital is discouraged. The visitor information centre recommends that people wanting to see rural Guadalcanal do a tour or take a guide rather than travelling alone.

ORIENTATION

Guadalcanal is oriented vaguely east-west, with Honiara on the northern coast overlooking Iron Bottom Sound, the famous graveyard of WWII's Battle for Guadalcanal. The hills behind Honiara eventually become a mighty mountain range reaching 2400m that separates the Weathercoast people from those on the northern coast. There are no roads to the Weathercoast, and access is either by foot, boat or helicopter.

Honiara's central area, from the Mendana Hotel to Chinatown, can be covered in a 30-minute walk along Mendana Ave, the town's main strip. In this area are the

central market, the port complex, shops, embassies, banks, hotels and restaurants. The 11km urban sprawl along the coast has the settlements of Rove and White River to the west, while eastwards are Chinatown and Mataniko. Beyond are Kukum and industrial Ranadi.

Maps

Hema publishes a *Solomon Islands* map (1:1.2 million) that's widely available. Ordnance maps are available from the **Ministry of Land & Housing offices** (☎ 21511) in Honiara.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 911)

Fire & Police (☎ 999)

Internet Access

Patrons of Honiara's better hotels can generally use in-house facilities.

People First Internet Café (☎ 26358; Anthony Saru Bldg; per hr S\$15)

Solomon Telekom (☎ 21576; Mendana Ave; per hr S\$30)

Solosoft (☎ 23386; Shop 23, NPF Plaza; per hr S\$15)

TM Internet (☎ 21055; Shop 16, NPF Plaza; per hr S\$16)

Medical Services

Bartimaeus Vision Care Centre (☎ 24040; Chinatown Ave)

Central Hospital (☎ 23600; Kukum)

Honiara Dental Centre (☎ 22746; Mendana Ave)

Money

The **NBSI** (National Bank of the Solomon Islands; ☎ 21874), **ANZ** (☎ 21111) and **Westpac** (☎ 21222) banks have branches on Mendana Ave, and there's also an NBSI in Chinatown.

Post

Post office (☎ 21821; Mendana Ave) Solomon Post opens weekdays and Saturday morning.

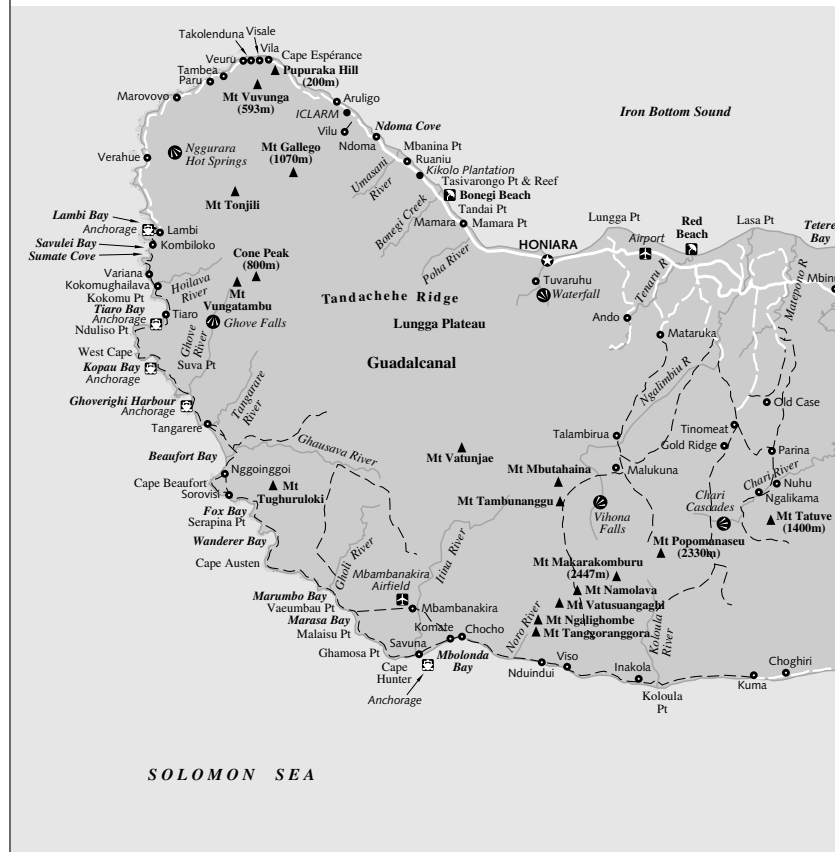
Telephone

Solomon Telekom (☎ 39241; Mendana Ave) Fax and telex services, and card and coin telephones, next to the post office.

Tourist Information

Visitor information centre (☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb; Mendana Ave) Near the Mendana Hotel, the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) office is open

GUADALCANAL



weekdays and Saturday morning. There is little printed material but staff can provide advice and contact isolated lodges and villages to make bookings.

Travel Agencies

Guadalcanal Travel Services (GTS; ☎ 22587; guadtrav@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave) The country has one international travel agency. It offers hotel and flight bookings, plus tours.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands personnel quickly restored law and order in the capital, and there are now no palpable feelings of danger. However, seek advice before travelling around Guadalcanal outside Honiara.

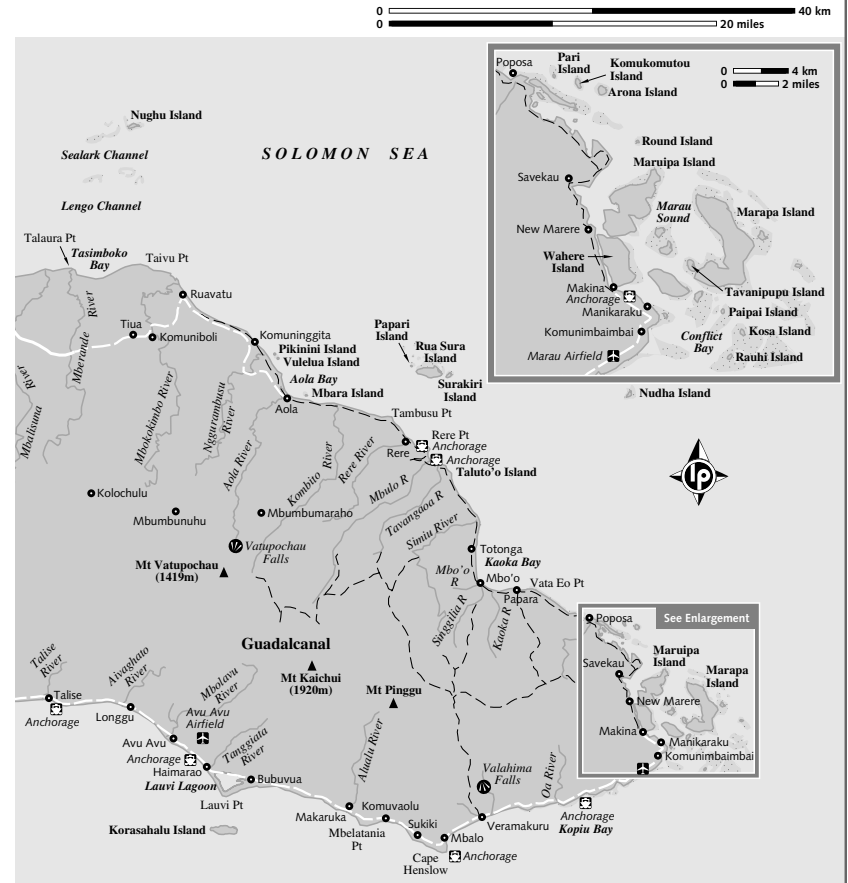
TRANSPORT Getting There & Away AIR

International flights land at Honiara's Henderson Airport, and all domestic routes begin and end in Honiara. See p577 for details of international flights.

GTS (☎ 22586; guadtrav@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave) is the agent for Air Niugini. The **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au; Mendana Ave) head office is in the centre of town.

BOAT

See p578 for inter-island shipping operators. Traders' boats gather beside the Point Cruz Yacht Club (p556).



Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The standard taxi fare into town is \$50. Major hotels do airport transfers for around \$25 per person.

CAR

Economy Car Rentals (☎ 27100; economy@solomon.com.sb; Mendana Ave) has cars from \$340 per day including insurance and kilometres. The office is next door to the visitor information centre. **Avis** (☎ 24180; qcmotors@solomon.com.sb) is in Chinatown.

MINIBUS

Honiara's minibuses are cheap, frequent (in daylight hours) and safe. They carry locals

and their *kago* (cargo) – kids, chooks, yams, pigs, anything. The flat fare around town is \$3.

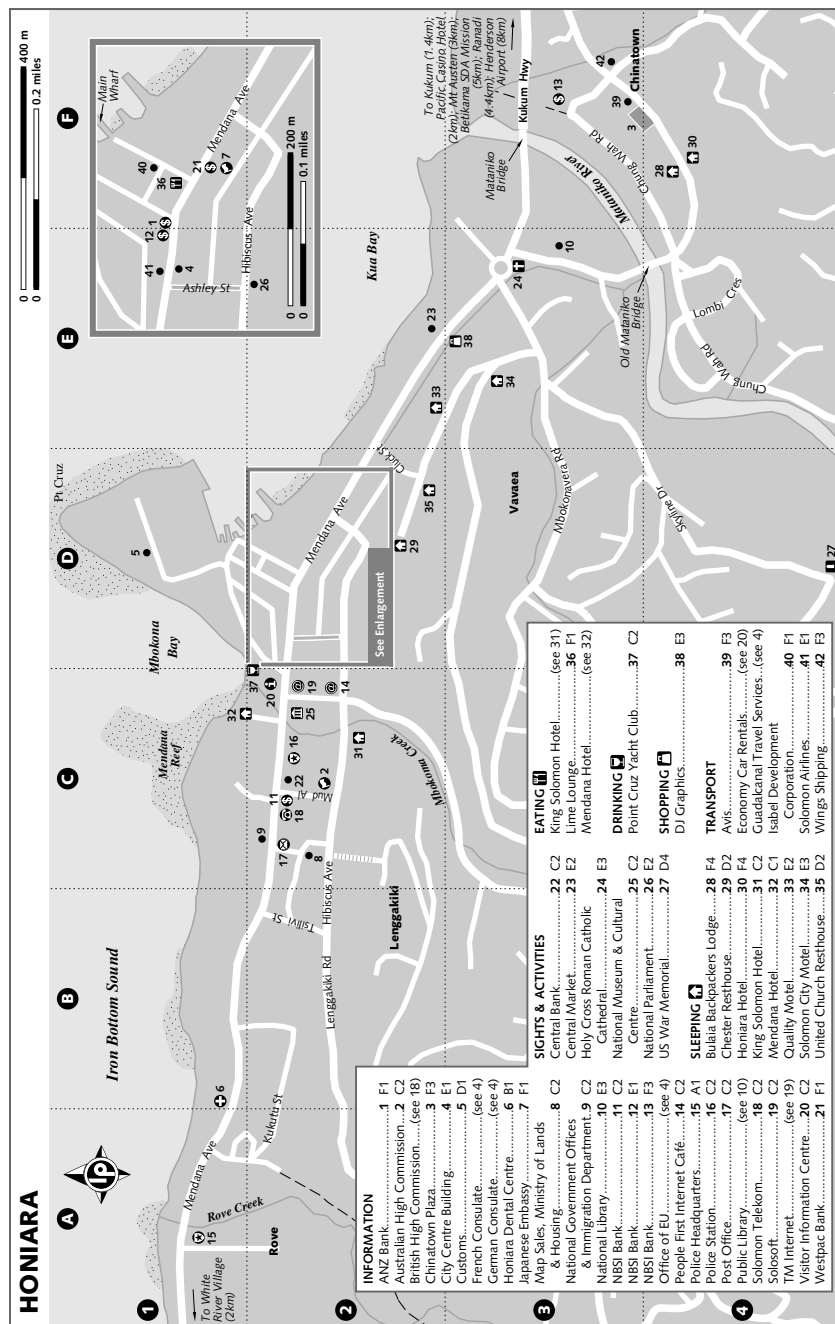
TAXI

There are taxis everywhere in Honiara. They don't have meters, so agree on a fare before hopping in – \$5 per kilometre is reasonable.

HONIARA

pop 57,000

It's hard to find too much to like about Honiara. It does have good hotels, restaurants, cafés and bars; markets and a museum; a golf course; local dive and charter-boat operators; and the shopping, though not quite



TROUBLE IN CHINATOWN

In April 2006, there was a sudden and unexpected turn of events in Honiara. An election – the first since the Tension – installed the controversial former deputy prime minister Snyder Rini as prime minister (PM). This news was greeted with two days of rioting and anarchy in the streets of Honiara, with the fury misdirected at the Chinese community. Chinatown and the Pacific Casino Hotel were both torched and razed to the ground. Australia flew in more troops to reinforce the Ramsi personnel and many Chinese fled the country. Quite clearly Rini did not have the support of the people. He resigned just eight days later when members of his own cabinet crossed the floor of parliament to vote with the opposition in a vote of no confidence. For many, Rini was a symbol of everything that was corrupt in the Solomon's government. When members of parliament then elected Manasseh Sogavare as PM, the violence in the streets turned to joy and everything immediately calmed down.

So why did the rioters target the Asian community if they were unhappy with a Melanesian PM? The Solomons is one of just a handful of countries that recognises Taiwan as an independent country, so Taiwanese largesse has supposedly lined the pockets of Solomons' members of parliament for years; within minutes of Rini being appointed PM, allegations were flying that he had bought the support required to secure a majority. Meanwhile resentment against new Chinese settlers has been bubbling away, with many Islanders believing that they have bribed their way to residency.

The tragedy is that Honiara's historic Chinatown is demolished and many long-time Chinese residents were terrorised and fled.

Milan, is great by local standards. But it is a hot, crowded and dusty place that's choked with traffic and litter. There's urban squalor on the edges and the main drag has a rather grim and harried atmosphere. It's not indicative of the Solomon Islands at all.

Since all international flights and inter-provincial travel routes come through Honiara, you'll end up spending *some* time in the capital, but there's no reason to spend more than a day or two buying some T-shirts, checking out the central market and visiting a war memorial. Honiara is also the centre of the Ramsi operation (see the boxed text, p550).

The circle-shaped **National Parliament**, on the hill above Ashley St, opened in 1993. There's a public gallery here.

In the town centre, the under-resourced **National Museum & Cultural Centre** (☎ 22098; Mendana Ave; admission \$52; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) houses interesting displays. Behind it are eight traditionally constructed houses, each from a different province.

The **Central Bank** (☎ 21791; Mendana Ave) displays woodcarvings from Rennell and Makira, along with traditional currencies, including Santa Cruz red-feather money, Malaitan dolphin-teeth and shell money, *mbarava* (white clam-shell carvings) from New Georgia and Choiseul clam-shell money.

Skyline Drive has commanding views over the town and leads to the **US War Memorial**, a hot 20-minute walk up from Mendana Ave. The locals have made some annotations.

Chinatown's main street, **Chung Wah Rd**, is one of Honiara's most interesting sights – it's lined with small shops and has a Wild West flavour.

TOURS

Battlefield tours around Honiara can be arranged through the visitor information centre (p551) and Guadalcanal Travel Services (p552). The tours take about three hours and cost \$200 per person.

Lalae Charters (☎ 38888; www.lalae.com.sb) arranges game and reef fishing and general charters. The boat is moored at the Point Cruz Yacht Club.

SLEEPING

Because of recent events none of the hotels have invested heavily in fresh paint and shiny new tap fittings. Even some of the better rooms have been neglected in recent years.

Budget

Bulia Backpackers Lodge (☎ 28819; Chinatown; tw \$5150) Offers clean accommodation and has a minimart on the premises.

United Church Resthouse (☎ 20028; Lower Vayvaya Rd; bed per person \$570) This resthouse has a good view from the terrace. Alcohol and smoking are not permitted.

Chester Resthouse (☎ 26355; fax 23079; Lower Vayvaya Rd; tw \$5130) Five minutes' walk from the centre of town, and run by Anglican brothers, Chester has a laundering service. Alcohol and smoking are not permitted.

Solomon City Motel (☎ 26264; Vayvaya Ridge Rd; s/d \$5100/170; ☎) This clean, basic motel overlooks the central market and has a shared kitchen and lounge area.

Midrange

Quality Motel (☎ 25150; qml.solomon.com.sb; Lower Vayvaya Rd; tw from \$5250; ☎) Quality Motel overlooks the central market and Iron Bottom Sound. All rooms are self-contained and some have snowy TV and telephone. There's an on-site Asian-style restaurant and small store.

Honiara Hotel (☎ 21737; www.honiarahotel.com.sb; Chinatown; fan-cooled tw \$5270, self-contained air-con tw \$5440; ☎) Another good option, with a pool, bar and restaurant. It's off Chinatown's colourful main street.

Airport Motel (☎ 36446; airportmtl@solomon.com.sb; tw from \$5250) This motel has a nice restaurant and bar, and is only a two-minute drive from the airport. It's also a good place for a cooling beverage after you've checked in to your international flight.

Top End

King Solomon Hotel (☎ 21205; kingsol.solomon.com.sb; Hibiscus Ave; d from \$5620; ☎) This international hotel is an old favourite, set on a steep hill with a funicular shuttle that shunts people between the rooms and the reception and restaurant area. It's full of character and it has a pool built into the hill. All rooms are large and comfortable with TV.

Mendana Hotel (☎ 20071; kitano@mendana.com.sb; Mendana Ave; s/tw from \$5510/550; ☎) The Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel (usually shortened to the Mendana) is right on the waterfront and has the best restaurant in town. All the rooms are comfortable and there's a large airy foyer area that looks out over a sandy white beach – lovely to lounge in with drink a newspaper.

Pacific Casino Hotel (☎ 25009; www.solomon-hotels.com; Kukum; tw from \$5450; ☎) At the eastern end of town, this large waterfront

hotel complex and casino offers a good standard of accommodation as well as gym facilities and sports courts. There are bars, a restaurant and various gaming rooms.

EATING

Lime Lounge (☎ 23064; mains \$545; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is the place to come for excellent breakfasts, light meals, good coffee and fresh fruit and yoghurt. There's great music and Australian newspapers and magazines are arrayed for patrons' use.

Mendana Hotel (☎ 20071; mains \$580-150; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Mendana puts on excellent eating in its restaurant from a varied menu of Western and Japanese dishes. Seafood is well prepared and salads are fresh and imaginative.

King Solomon Hotel (☎ 21205; mains \$570-120; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) They've done some weird renovations to the front of the lovely leafhouse that is the restaurant and bar area of the King Solomon Hotel. A strange glass façade and boxy bar area have been added for no obvious benefit. However, the King Solomon boasts an excellent restaurant that's patronised by expats and prosperous locals as well as international patrons of the city's other hotels – an interesting mix of local glitterati. Seafood is the inclination of the menu, but chicken and vegetarian choices are also available.

Pacific Casino Hotel (☎ 25009; mains \$570-150; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Pacific Casino Hotel has a rather overly decorated restaurant on the waterfront offering fine Western and Asian cuisine. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served at tables that have a great view north over the Nggela Islands.

Fortune Restaurant (☎ 20629; mains \$580-210; ☎) dinner) Also within the grounds of the Pacific Casino Hotel, the Fortune is an up-market Chinese restaurant offering Western and international dishes.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The bars at Honiara's top-end hotels are popular and often offer live entertainment – bamboo bands, Micronesian hula dancers.

Point Cruz Yacht Club (☎ 22500) There are middle-aged expat guys who've been sitting on the same barstools here for 20 years. Each is a living time-capsule – '70s porn-star moustaches, polo shirts and high-rise khaki work shorts. These guys were dandy fashion

plates when they emigrated, but decades on they need a style update. The yacht club is next to the Mendana Hotel and has a happy hour on Friday evening. Frequented by expats, crusty yachties – who use the shower facilities and reprovision their vessels tethered offshore – and well-heeled islanders, it's an interesting place to enjoy a Sol-brew beer and the sea breeze.

SHOPPING

Carvers gather under the leafhouse outside the Mendana Hotel and there are shops selling carvings on Mendana Ave. The shop in the National Museum also has some good pieces. *Bukaware* is available from vendors and shops.

The stallholders at the central market offer fresh fruit, fish and shell necklaces. The ladies sell shell jewellery and a guy sells WWII-era Coke bottles and other detritus – a GI's dogtag goes for \$5250.

DJ Graphics (☎ 22011; Mendana Ave) Opposite the central market, this place sells souvenir T-shirts.

EAST OF HONIARA

Mataniko Falls is a spectacular thundering of water down a cliff straight into a vast cave below. Japanese soldiers hid in this cavern as well as others nearby. It's a two-hour walk from Honiara. See the visitor information centre (p551) about procuring a guide. At Tuvuru, cross the river and follow it south.

At **Mt Austen** you'll find a vandalised Japanese war memorial and an expansive view over Iron Bottom Sound towards Savo and the Nggela Islands.

About 6km from Honiara is the turn-off south to the **Betikama SDA Mission**. There's a large carving shop with a collection of WWII debris, and a crocodile in a pen behind the shop.

A memorial at **Henderson Airport** honours US forces and their Pacific islander allies. About 100m to the west of the terminal is the **US WWII control tower**.

Marau Sound

Marau Sound is a large lagoon at the eastern tip of Guadalcanal with fringing reefs around clusters of islands. The Paipai and Aaritenamo reefs which enclose many islets are particularly dazzling.

The luxurious **Tavanipupu Island Resort** (☎ 29043; www.tavanipupu.com; per person full board \$5880) offers fishing, sailing, snorkelling and canoeing, but the primary attractions are the island location, stylish accommodation, excellent food and great hospitality. Currently, access is by boat only, since the Marau airstrip is closed. Transfers from Honiara cost \$5600 return in a vessel that can carry eight people. Tavanipupu Island is in Marau Sound, in Guadalcanal's eastern tip.

WEST OF HONIARA

Independent travel is not currently recommended beyond White River, a Gilbertese village about 4km west of the town centre.

WEATHERCOAST

Mighty rivers empty into the sea on the Weathercoast, where there's very little development due to the rugged terrain. There are no roads to the Weathercoast and no airstrips. Access is only by foot, boat or helicopter.

CENTRAL PROVINCE

Central Province is made up of the Nggela (or Florida) group, Savo and the Russell Islands. There are dive operators and resorts in the Nggela and the Russells, where the scuba diving and snorkelling are world class, and there are many hidden beaches.

NGGELA ISLANDS

pop 21,600 / area 1000 sq km

Also known as the Florida Islands, the rugged silhouette of the Nggela group is clearly visible on the northern horizon across Iron Bottom Sound from Honiara.

TRANSPORT

Boats link Tulagi and Maravagi with Honiara. Small cargo boats take two hours to ply between Tulagi and the capital, charging about \$570 one way. Arranging a charter costs about \$51400 return.

Mangalonga (Mana)

This small island is near the northern end of the Nggela group. Canoe transfers per person are \$5100 from Honiara and \$550 from Tulagi.

MEGAPODES

Known in Pijin as *skrab dak* or *skrab foal*, megapodes build large mounds of dirt and leaves in which their eggs are incubated by the heat from the sun and rotting vegetation. In volcanic areas such as Savo, however, the birds just lay their eggs in holes scratched into the hot sand.

After eight or nine weeks the young hatch, fully developed. Pecking their way out of their shells and scratching up to the surface through the soft sand, they can run immediately and fly shortly after.

Megapode eggs are considered a delicacy by islanders, and Savo's megapode-breeding area is divided into family plots. Care is taken not to over-harvest the eggs – there is a closed season each year when eggs may not be taken.

Based at the Maravagi Resort, **Dive Maravagi** (☎ 29065; scubacrew@yahoo.com.au) offers diving expeditions over WWII wrecks and coral gardens.

Relaxing **Maravagi Resort** (☎ 29065; bungalows A\$50 per person) is popular with Honiara's expats and is in an idyllic setting. The rustic leafhouse bungalows have ceiling fans, shower and toilet, and are set among large shady trees beside a sheltered cove.

Tulagi

In the middle of the Nggela, Tulagi was the Solomons' former capital; it was also a Japanese base during WWII. Tulagi has some provincial government offices, a post office, a branch of the NBSI, a library, a hospital and a Telekom office. There are WWII relics and reminders of the colonial era to explore.

Dive Tulagi (☎ 32052; www.tulagidive.com.sb), based at Vanita Accommodation, operates dives to attractions including the destroyer USS *Aaron Ward*, the oil tanker USS *Kanawha* and the corvette HMNZS *Moa*, sunk during the battle for Guadalcanal. Single-tank dives are A\$75.

Vanita Accommodation (☎ 32074; fax 32186; dm \$585, self-contained tw \$5130) has eight twin-bed rooms, a bar and restaurant. The standard is very basic.

SAVO

pop 3500 / area 31 sq km

Savo, which is about halfway between the Russells and the Nggela group, is clearly visible to the northwest from Honiara. This rugged island has some spectacular hot springs, mud pools and geysers. The visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) can arrange a tour to see the thermal activity and the megapodes.

RUSSELL ISLANDS

pop 5500 / area 210 sq km

Beef and copra producers Russell Islands Plantation Estates Ltd (Ripel) owns much of the Russell Islands. The area has submarine caverns, prolific reef growth and many sunken war wrecks. Live-aboard dive boats such as the **MV Bilikiki** (www.bilikiki.com) do trips around the Russell Islands.

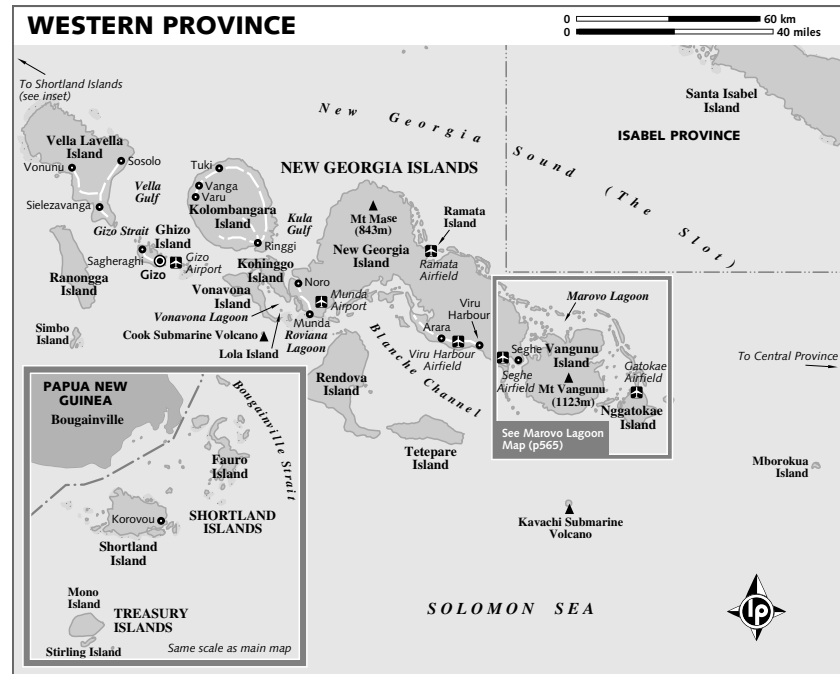
Mbanika and **Pavuvu** are two of the largest islands. **Yandina**, on Mbanika's east coast, is the subprovincial headquarters.

WESTERN PROVINCE

pop 68,000 / area 5330 sq km

Western Province is spectacularly beautiful. Pristine lagoons, tropical islets, skull shrines, incredible diving and snorkelling are just part of what makes the New Georgia region of Western Province an essential place to visit. There's good tourist infrastructure – comfortable lodgings, reasonable restaurants – and well-serviced inter-island boat routes that are much cheaper than Solomon Airlines' domestic sectors. That said, the lagoons look exquisite from the air, the lush islands, white-sand bars and beaches, turquoise coral shallows and inky-blue seas come together in a breathtaking vista as you fly overhead. Tall volcanic islands draw heavy rain clouds while the islets, reefs and coral gardens sparkle in bright sunlight. Rainbows break out routinely and every panorama is supersaturated with hues and textures – muted thunderclaps and little electrical storms. 'The West' is also littered with the legacy of WWII.

Gizo, Munda and Marovo Lagoon make up most of the country's tourist industry you can tour all three at a comfortable leisurely



pace. The province has excellent accommodation options, including resorts located on Lola and Uepi.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 60173) office in Gizo is near the police station and the airfield is on Nusatupe Island; the boat between the airfield and town costs \$20. Daily flights link Gizo to Honiara (from \$825), via Munda (from \$380) or Seghe (from \$450). Other flights go to Choiseul (from \$440), Yandina (from \$675) and Ramata (from \$380).

Boat

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) is an excellent alternative to flying. It does a Honiara–Gizo route taking in Mbunikalo, Gasini and Seghe in Marovo Lagoon; Ugehe on Rendova; and Noro en route. The 12-hour Honiara–Gizo trip costs \$340 (\$370 1st class upstairs) and leaves Honiara's main wharf at 7am on Wednesday, returning Thursday.

Weekdays except Wednesday **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180; Agnes Lodge, Munda) runs a shuttle boat connecting Gizo to Munda via Noro or Mandou. The Gizo–Munda fare is \$5130.

GHIZO

pop 6000 / area 37 sq km

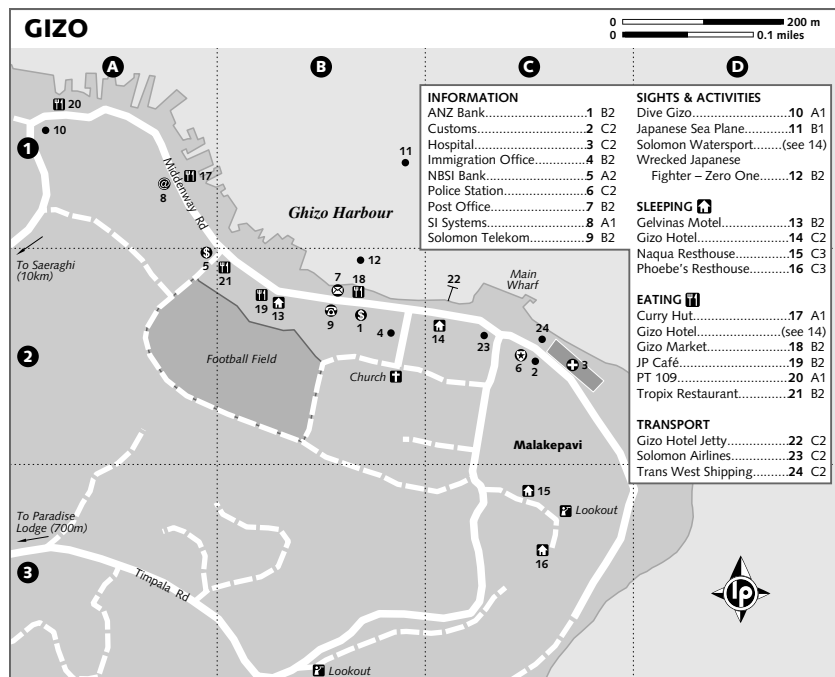
Western Province has some of the best diving and snorkelling in the world. You don't have to be a diver to appreciate the underwater world because many coral gardens and WWII wrecks are accessible without an aqualung.

Little Ghizo island is a dwarf next to its neighbours, but it has the Solomons' second-biggest 'city', Gizo (pronounced the same, spelt differently) – the most developed area outside the capital.

Gizo

pop 4500

Sprawled along the waterfront with steep hills behind, Gizo is an interesting place that's full of character. The town would've been quite pretty in its colonial heyday



but some buildings are now in disrepair, gently rusting away under the tropical sun. Gizo was a WWII Japanese seaplane base – there are two wrecked Japanese planes in the waters just off Gizo's market. Two worn monuments in front of the police station commemorate early European traders.

INFORMATION

The Gizo Hotel will change travellers cheques, but at a poorer rate than the banks. Credit cards are accepted by tour operators and better hotels, but you'll be expected to use cash for midrange or budget accommodation. The tiny post office is in a building in the market area of the waterfront.

Ambulance (☎ 60224)

ANZ Bank (☎ 60262; Middenway Rd)

NBSI (☎ 60539; Middenway Rd)

Police (☎ 60966)

SI Systems (Middenway Rd; per min \$51.50) Offers Internet access.

Solomon Telekom (☎ 60127; Middenway Rd; Internet access per min 80c) The Telekom office has card- and coin-operated public phones and fax services.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Danny and Kerrie Kennedy have run **Dive Gizo** (☎ 60253; www.divegizo.com; Middenway Rd), at the western end of town, since 1985. Danny's now the member for Gizo in the provincial government and involved in conservation and community projects. Nice people, they'll meet you at the airport or wharf and drive you to your digs. They have a full dive shop and will take you over WWII wreckage and stunning reefs around Roviana Lagoon. Two boat dives and a picnic lunch cost A\$130.

Solomon Watersport (☎ 60646; www.solomonwatersport.com; Middenway Rd) operates out of the Gizo Hotel and offers activities such as diving, sailing, kayaking and windsurfing. It's run by Hans Mergozzi, and he's a nice guy too. Two-tank dives cost A\$125 per day.

Both companies can arrange sportfishing charters and hikes, including a two-day climb of Kolombangara's volcano (A\$100 per person based on two walkers; includes transport, landing fees, guide, porter and one night's accommodation in the village with a local meal).

Surfing

Surfing is new to the Solomons, although the surf's been here for ever. There's excellent point surfing off Pailongge (pronounced pye-long-y), a Gilbertese village one-hour's walk from town on Ghizo's southern coast. The October-to-April swell rises to 2m or more. There's a great left-hander nearer Titiana village, with a long paddle out to the reef's edge, and a right at Pailongge. Dive Gizo employs a local surfer who's finding new breaks all the time. Bring your own boards.

SLEEPING

Budget

Gelvinas Motel (☎ 60276; amcd@solomon.com.sb; Middenway Rd; s/d & tr \$5250; ☎) Gelvinas, on the main drag, is central to all the action – night-times are quiet, but the early morning can be noisy as traders prepare for the day. The rooms are large, self-contained and quite comfortable, and each has a small balcony overlooking the main street. There's a simple communal kitchen and each room has a fridge.

Phoebe's Resthouse (☎ 60336; fax 60035; per person \$560) Phoebe's is a great budget option on a hill overlooking the town and eastern beaches – it's much quieter here than in town itself. Rooms share facilities, and there are commanding ocean views from the large airy common area with kitchen. Phoebe's is popular with medical students from the UK and Australia who work at the hospital as part of their studies.

Paradise Lodge (☎ 60024; plodge@solomon.com.sb; dm/tw with private facilities \$570/180) Paradise offers self-catering and full-board options, with

a bar on the premises and inspiring ocean views. It's a 15-minute walk to town or the owner will drive you. Three-course evening meals are available: beef, chicken or fish \$55; lobster \$565.

Naqua Resthouse (☎ 60012; fax 60278; r per person \$590, self-contained air-con s & d \$5220; ☎) The comfortable Naqua has an airy communal kitchen and spacious lounge area with good views. The rooms are clean and functional and it's a short walk from town.

Top End

Gizo Hotel (☎ 60199; www.gizohotel.com; Middenway Rd; s/d from \$5400; ☎) The Gizo Hotel is the best address in town, with bars, a pool and one of Gizo's best restaurants. Standard rooms, all with private facilities, sleep three people and have a fridge, International Direct Dialing phone and all the other necessary equipment for leisure or business.

Sanbis Resort (☎ 60646; www.solomonwatersport.com/sanbis/sanbis_home.htm; Mbabanga Island; per person incl breakfast A\$160) Hans and Rita Mergozzi run Sanbis out on quiet Mbabanga Island, 10 minutes by boat from Gizo. This new eco-friendly place has four stylish double beachside bungalows and two that sleep six. There's a large communal lounge and bar area with views over the lagoon. Sanbis offers free transfers to Gizo during daylight hours and is part of the Solomons Watersport group operating out of the Gizo Hotel.

EATING

PT 109 (Middenway Rd; mains \$570-90; ☎ dinner) Named after John F Kennedy's WWII patrol

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Fatboys (☎ 60095; www.fatboysgizo.com; meals around \$575) Fatboys bar and restaurant is terrific. It's on Mbabanga Island, at the end of a pier that hovers over the exquisite waters of Vonavona Lagoon, and is only accessible by boat (\$550 return, 10 minutes from Gizo). The vast room has no walls and a high roof with rotating fans, creating a lovely airy space directly over the lagoon that stretches out in every direction. The bar serves cold drinks and cocktails, and the kitchen offers dishes with a seafood and Asian twist such as deep-fried crayfish (\$590) and red Thai curry chicken (\$575). There are billiard and *football* tables, DVD screens, a reading library and book-swap, plus kayaks tied up to the broad landings that offer great swimming over sandy shallows, but most visitors can't take their gaze off the extraordinary view.

Proprietor Grant Griffiths is building a couple of luxury bungalows – one with a queen and three single beds at \$5600 to \$5800 per room, one with a queen and single for \$5400 to \$5500 and a third bungalow offering lodge-style accommodation for around \$5125 per person. It's eventually expected to accommodate 20, and was expected to be complete by June 2006.

boat that sank off Gizo, and in a great waterfront location, this is the best restaurant in town. A blackboard displays half-a-dozen main dishes – local fish, chicken, vegetarian options – and they're all excellent. You can drop by for a cooling drink in the afternoon, but meals are only served in the evening.

Gizo Hotel (☎ 60199; Middenway Rd; mains S\$80-120; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Gizo Hotel dominates most things in town and naturally the restaurant is up to par, with well-prepared food and friendly staff. The changing menu incorporates fresh fish and seafood dishes as well as chicken, beef and giant plates of fresh tropical fruit – it's also the only place where you can buy an early-morning breakfast.

Tropix Restaurant (Middenway Rd; meals S\$40-60) Tropix is a cheap and cheerful alternative, with ample meals and quick service. Simple fish and chips as well as more elaborate dishes are on offer.

JP Café (Middenway Rd) and **Curry Hut** (Middenway Rd) offer clean takeaway food – rice and fish, curry and boiled eggs.

Around Ghizo Island

Pailongge, 6km from Gizo, is a neat Gilbertese village with several good surf breaks. **Saeraghi**, 11km from Gizo, has one of the Solomons' most beautiful beaches. It's about 500m before the village. **Nusatupe** is just big enough for an airstrip. Seven kilometres southeast of Gizo, **Kennedy Island** is where John F Kennedy and 10 shipmates swam ashore after their PT-109 patrol boat was sunk by the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* in August 1943.

ISLANDS AROUND GHIZO

War debris and natural attractions are the main drawcards of the islands surrounding Ghizo. Also known as Nduke, **Kolombangara** features a classic cone-shaped volcano that rises to 1770m; it's a two-day hike to the top and back. **Simbo** has two active volcanic cones in the south. **Vila Point** was an important WWII Japanese base and you can still see guns in the bush. A skull site at **Pa Na Ghundu** contains 12 coral-stone reliquaries; others are at Pa Na Ulu and Gurava. Righuru has two **petroglyph sites**, and there's another at Vavreviri Point.

Butterflies and birds are the main attractions for visitors to **Ranongga**. The high western coast of the island falls into deep

water, while the eastern coast is lower, with terraces and onshore reefs.

Mountainous **Vella Lavella** is dominated by the dormant volcano Mt Tambisala – it is 790m high, yet its crater floor is close to sea level. There are megapodes in the island's Ulo River area, where there's a large thermal area, and parrots and butterflies are everywhere you look. Snakes and crocodiles are also plentiful.

In 1965 a WWII Japanese soldier was found still hiding in the bush on Vella Lavella; he was returned home to Japan with full military honours. There have been other alleged sightings since, including one in 1989 near Voramare Bay.

Vella Lavella has two airfields: Barakoma has weekly connections to Gizo (from S\$380) and Choiseul Bay (from S\$430); Geva is serviced weekly from Gizo (from S\$390).

Cargo boats and motor-canoes ply between Gizo and Vella Lavella, but boat services are irregular.

NEW GEORGIA ISLAND

pop 22,000 / area 2145 sq km

The area around New Georgia includes the islands of Vonavona, Kohinggo, Rendova and Tetepare. Munda, on New Georgia itself, makes a suitable base for exploring this part of the province.

Munda

New Georgia's largest settlement is a collection of contiguous villages strung 6km along the shore from Ilangana to Kindu. An important Japanese base during WWII, Munda is close to the junction of Vonavona and Roviana Lagoons, and a good base for exploring the area's many attractions.

Munda has the airport terminal, government offices, an NBSI branch, a police station, hospital and Telekom office.

SIGHTS

There are freshwater pools at **Ndunde** containing turtles and fish, and a small crocodile farm.

The US Dump is a pile of WWII material rusting in the bush at **Kia**. It's a weird, somehow otherworldly sight – landing craft, barges and other heavy equipment upended in a massive angular pile of rusty metal with 60 years of virulent jungle growth protruding through every opening. Nothing is rec-

ognisable, and you can almost imagine it as the remnants of a crashed UFO – Munda's own Roswell Incident. It's a 20-minute walk from Agnes Lodge (below) and worth the S\$20 *kastom* fee.

On the main road above the US Dump, Bolton Lizu operates a small **museum** of WWII relics.

TOURS

Based at Agnes Lodge, **Dive Munda** (☎ 62156; www.divegizo.com) is operated by Danny and Kerrie Kennedy of Dive Gizo (p560); lovely Vizi Ahi Leve runs the Munda office. Dive Munda offers diving over numerous wall, wreck and reef sites (A\$145 for two boat dives).

Also based at Agnes Lodge, **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180) offers excursions into Roviana Lagoon, to Mt Bau and Holupuru Falls, and various WWII sites. There's a lot to see in the local area, including Roviana Island's Dog Stone and Skull Island. The lagoon has countless islands with long sandy beaches where you can be left for a few hours' swimming.

SLEEPING & EATING

Agnes Lodge (☎ 62133; www.agneslodge.com; dm/d/ cottage A\$15/70/115; ☎) Right on the waterfront, Agnes Lodge is the centre of all things that happen in sleepy Munda. It's a short walk from the airport terminal. The dorm rooms are fan cooled and share bathroom facilities, but the self-contained rooms and cottages are air-conditioned, large and comfortable. There's a good restaurant and bar area, and a carver's hut on the grounds.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The minuscule airport terminal has a **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 61152) counter.

Solomon Airlines connects Munda with Honiara (from S\$750), Gizo (from S\$380) and Seghe (from S\$380) daily. Flights go twice-weekly to Ramata (from S\$380) and Viru Harbour (from S\$380).

Boat

Go West Tours (☎ 62180) daily Munda–Gizo shuttle service (S\$130) stops at Goldie (S\$20), Noro (S\$45) and Ringgi on Kolombangara (S\$85) en route. It departs Munda at 7.30am.

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104) doesn't pull into Munda on its Wednesday and Thursday Honiara–Gizo route, but does stop at nearby Ughele (from Honiara S\$280) on Rendova and at Noro (from Honiara S\$300).

Around Munda

The 10m **Holupuru Falls** are just north of the bridge over the Mburape River. Below the waterfall is a deep swimming hole. Stones and pillars stand on raised platforms deep in the bush atop **Mt Bau**, representing ancestral spirits. The site is about 9km inland from the coast at Ilangana on an overgrown bush trail towards Enoghae Point.

Noro, 16km northwest of Munda up the Diamond Narrows, is home to the large government-owned Soltai fish cannery. There's also an NBSI branch and a police station. There's no reason to stop in Noro, unless you want to see the fish cannery. **Noro Lodge** (☎ 61238; tw per person S\$120-190, tw with private facilities from S\$125) caters mainly to fishery workers. It's grungy but spacious and there's a licensed restaurant.

Notorious head-hunter Ingava ruled from a coral-walled fortress on **Nusa Roviana** until it was destroyed in 1892. His tribe had a dog, Tiola, as its totem, and people worshipped at a rock carved in its likeness before going head-hunting. Remains of the **Stone Dog** are still here. The fortress is up to 30m wide, and 500m of coral walls still remain. There's a giant's cave nearby. Nusa Roviana is 4km east of Munda. *Kastom* fees are charged.

Roviana Lagoon extends 52km eastwards from Munda to Kalena Bay, and has many small islets. **Nusa Hope Island** is home to a crocodile farm.

Viru Harbour, 30km southeast, was an important WWII Japanese base and is now a saw-milling centre. In the 19th century five coral-stone fortresses protected the sea entrance from head-hunters. Stone monoliths and coral-rock platforms stand on nearby ridge tops.

Vonavona Lagoon

This beautiful lagoon extends 28km between the Blackett Strait islets and Nusaghele.

Lola is an idyllic island of about 40 hectares, 20 minutes by boat from Munda. There's excellent seasonal reef-break surfing off the southern end of the island. With

its white-sand beach and views across the lagoon to Kolombangara's volcano, **Zipolo Habu Resort** (☎ 62178; www.zipolohabu.com.sb; s/d/tr \$555/80/100) has been run by Joe and Lisa Entriakin since 1989. The resort caters to many returning anglers who pose for photos with monster fish – me-and-my-barracuda photos are displayed around the bar area. Accommodation is in large fan-cooled bungalows with kitchens and fridges; bathroom facilities are shared. The meal package costs \$55 per day or you can prepare your own. Zipolo Habu offers village tours, hiking, sportfishing and surf charters. Return boat transfer to Munda costs \$60 per boatload. Some people visit Zipolo Habu just for the lunch – excellent fish and chips (\$48) and burgers with chips (\$65).

Skull Island sounds as if it might be in a pirate story for boys. In fact, the island is the final resting place for the skulls of countless vanquished warriors, as well as a shrine for the skulls of Rendova chiefs. Rendova's head-hunters dominated the Vonavona Lagoon, repeatedly wiping out the region's entire population (save for a few women who'd be 'adopted' into the clan). Skull Island is truly spooky – shell money, stone bracelets and other votive objects adorn the reliquary. It's on a tiny islet at the tip of Kundu Point on Vonavona. The *kastom* owners charge \$20 to visit.

Due south of Roviana Lagoon, **Rendova** is home to about 3000 people. The Japanese had more than 20 large anti-aircraft guns at Rendova Harbour until US marines captured the harbour in June 1943 and used it as a base for PT boats; these included PT-109, which was skippered by John F Kennedy. Also called Mt Longguoreke, **Rendova Peak** (1063m) dominates the island; climbing the peak takes two days return. **Egholo Cove** is a large inlet with a rusting war wreck on the shore at its southern entrance.

The 120-sq-km **Tetepare** is said to be the South Pacific's largest uninhabited island. It's one of the Solomons' conservation jewels – a large rainforested island untouched by logging companies. Tetepare is managed by the **Tetepare Descendants' Association** (☎ 62163; www.tetepare.org). The island has important breeding grounds for leatherback and green turtles, dugongs and other rare wildlife. There is a research station, trained guides, canopy

platforms for bird-watching and accommodation huts. The association is looking to have the island World Heritage listed.

Visits to Tetepare incur a one-off \$550 *kastom* fee, regardless of time spent. Accommodation is in a comfortable leafhouse (\$200 per person) and is arranged through the Tetepare Descendants' Association. Walking and activities are offered, and one-way transfers cost \$400 per boatload from Banaita and \$1200 from Munda.

Australian biologists John and Katherine Read have been coming to Tetepare for years to assist in the establishment of conservation projects and the descendants' association. John has written a book called *Tetepare: The Last Wilderness Island of the South Pacific* (2006), which is a mix of amusing personal anecdotes, well-explained science and ecological issues, and good story telling.

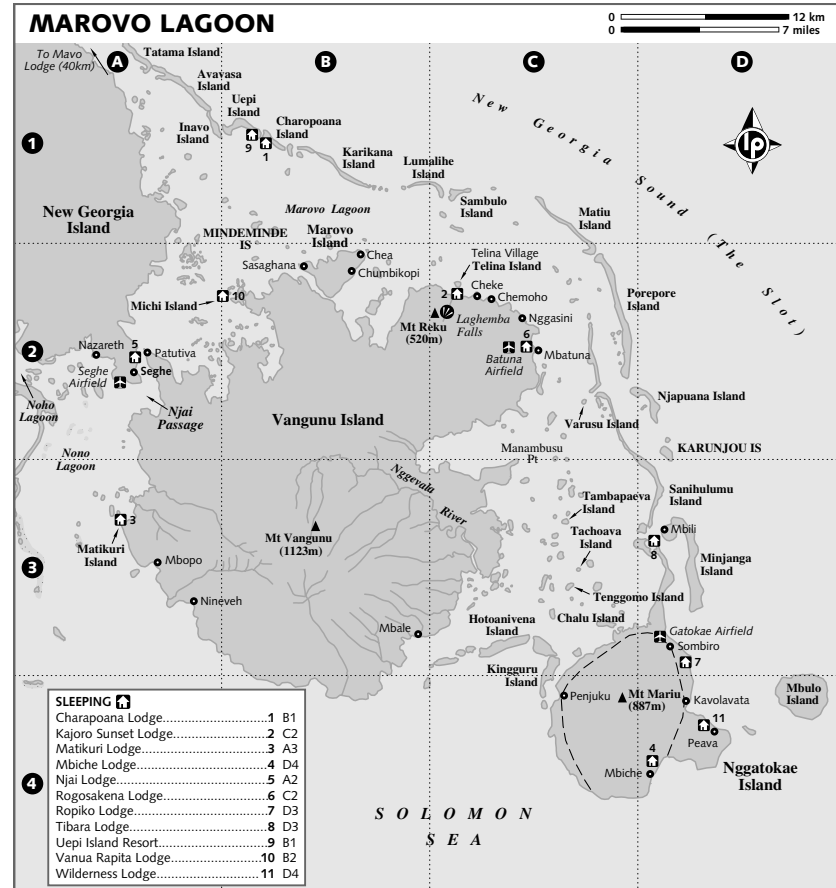
MAROVO LAGOON

On New Georgia's eastern side, Marovo Lagoon is the world's finest double barrier-enclosed lagoon, bordered by the large New Georgia and Vangunu Islands on one side and a double line of long barrier islands on the other. It contains hundreds of beautiful small islands, most of which are covered by coconut palms and rainforest and surrounded by coral. World Heritage listing was being pursued until recently, when logging on New Georgia Island and Vangunu discouraged the proponents.

Several bare escarpments rise from sea level up New Georgia and Vangunu Islands and these sully the lagoon water after rains. Each is a gash, a wound in the heavily wooded island shorelines of the two major perimeter islands – ugly incursions on paradise. Run-off discolours the lagoon water, which the locals call 'Milo'. From the air the water changes from a brilliant aqua to a ruddy bluey-brown. The run-off falls out as sediment after a few days and the water is crystal clear again, but it chokes up the reefs. Logging has been very contentious around Marovo.

Information

There are no phones in the Marovo Lagoon area, but bookings for the resorts and lodges in the Marovo and adjoining Noro Lagoon can be made through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551). The lodges here are generally leafhouse style



with twin rooms, share facilities, attractive waterfront settings and no electricity.

European Union funding has been granted for the development of a Marovo Lagoon-specific website that will include email connections. The website will be ready in 2006.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
The guy at the **Solomon Airlines** (☎ in Gizo 60173) counter at Seghe airstrip has been doing the same job for more than 20 years: he rides up to the shed on a (newer) bicycle, radios Honiara and the Gizo airstrip to confirm the flights; he weighs your luggage and your

good self, and checks everything on and off the 'Sol Air' De Havilland Twin Otter aircraft. He's a one-man airport and Solomon Airlines ought to recognise his contribution. There's a new terminal under construction but it still won't have a telephone.

Flights connect Seghe to Honiara (from \$650), Munda (from \$380) and Gizo (from \$450) on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. However, it's possible that *any* flight between Gizo, Munda and Ramata (to the west), and Honiara (east) may be rerouted through Seghe and it's also possible that a scheduled flight mightn't land at Seghe. 'Sol Air' is fickle and flirtatious with this little airstrip, and folks have learnt to be ever-ready and flexible.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Uepi Island Resort (☎ in Australia 03-9787 7904; www.uepi.com; per person full board A\$210) Uepi (oo-py) is an essential place to spend at least a few days while in the Solomons. It is one of the lagoon's barrier islands, exposed on one side to the open sea and overlooking the lagoon on the other. Large self-contained bungalows that sleep up to six are discreetly arrayed among lovely bush gardens, spider orchids and coconut palms. They are fan-cooled but airy and each has its own leafhouse veranda. The food is excellent: breakfast and dinner are served in a breezy dining room with superb views, while luncheon – a platter – is brought to your bungalow to graze over as you please. There's a bar and a library-cum-bookswap facility, and a DVD player in the common area. Return boat transfers from Seghe cost A\$70.

You don't need to be a diver to appreciate the world-class tropical underwater world that supports gorgeous reefs, corals, giant clams and fish in great clouds of tens of thousands in impossible ultra-vivid colours. The humble snorkeller can see all of this at the end of the short Uepi jetty where the island falls away 30m to a deep tidal channel. All that and a shiver of sharks – black-tip reef sharks – swim around one of the jetties. You'll be assured that they won't eat you, and they won't, but it is unnerving in the extreme the first time you encounter them.

The resort has a full dive shop and can arrange overnight kayaking trips, village tours and sportfishing. The evening coconut crab tour is a highlight. Uepi is earthy, chilled-out and luxurious, and it's as popular with honeymooners and romantics as it is with divers.

Boat

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104) stops at Seghe on its way to Gizo (S\$160) on Wednesday and Honiara (S\$260) on Thursday.

Seghe

This subprovincial headquarters on south-east New Georgia's coast has grown up around the US-built WWII airfield. The area's largest settlement is strung out along the Njai Passage, which links Noro Lagoon to Marovo Lagoon. Seghe is the launching place for a trip into magnificent Marovo Lagoon.

A short boat ride from the airport terminal, **Njai Lodge** (per bed S\$75) has a kitchen, shared shower facilities and flush toilet. Contact Jack Forest at the **Gelvinas Motel** (☎ 60276; amcd@solomon.com.sb) in Gizo.

Matikuri

The **Matikuri Lodge** (per person incl meals S\$120) can arrange guided walks from Mbopo village on Vangunu and also offers trips to Bareho, a Seventh-Day Adventist carving centre. It's a very friendly place. One-way transfers from Seghe are S\$30 per person.

Ramata

Mavo Lodge (per person incl meals S\$100) is at the Marovo Lagoon's northern end. It offers fishing trips, excellent snorkelling, village tours, skull shrines and hikes. **Go Tours Travel**

(☎ 07-5591 2199; www.gotours.com.au) in Queens-land, Australia offers fishing packages to Ramata.

Solomon Airlines (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies to Ramata twice weekly from Honiara (from S\$720) and Gizo (from S\$380).

Michi

Vanua Rapita Lodge (per person S\$110) is a short boat ride from the mainland. Transfers from Seghe are S\$30 each way.

Charapoana

The **Charapoana Lodge** (d/full board S\$100/210) is next door to the Uepi resort (see above) and you can arrange your activities and transfers through the resort – a good choice for rustic accommodation on Marovo Lagoon.

Vangunu

Kajoro Sunset Lodge (per person S\$120) is owned by local legend and master carver John Wein. John's narratives on tribal history and excursions to *tabu* (taboo) sites are fascinating. Transfers from Seghe cost S\$200 (shared).

Rogosakena Lodge (per person S\$130) is 6km west, near Lolovuro village, and just south of the airstrip at Mbatuna.

Nggatokae

Nggatokae (gat-oh-kye) is a large volcanic cone that reaches its 887m peak on Mt Mariu's narrow crater rim.

Tibara Lodge (per person full board S\$130) is on the island's northern tip near the Mbili Passage, which is on the Honiara–Gizo shipping route. Chief Luton offers various activities, such as hikes, fishing and snorkelling. The wreck of a USAAF B24D bomber lies crumpled in the nearby bush.

Ropiko Lodge (per person full board S\$130) is a short motor-canoe ride from the Gatokae airstrip. Activities include a visit to Mbiche village and its fascinating *kastom* sites, lagoon tours, fishing and snorkelling. A wrecked Zero fighter lies just beyond the resort.

Wilderness Lodge (☎ within the Solomons satellite 0061 145 125 948; www.thewildernesslodge.org; per person full board US\$95) is a large leafhouse with two bedrooms which each sleep four. Activities include a hike to the top of Mt Mariu and to the crater rim of Mt Vangunu. There's also fishing and a boat ride to see Kavachi (an active underwater volcano). Children aged five to 12 are half-price; under five free. Boat transfers from Gatokae cost US\$50 per person.

On the weathercoast of Nggatokae island, **Mbiche Lodge** (per person S\$100) is an option for village-based leafhouse accommodation (see p573).

RENNELL & BELLONA PROVINCE

pop 2400 / area 629 sq km

The Polynesian outliers of Rennell and Bellona are both rocky uplifted-coral atolls. Eastern Rennell has been a World Heritage site since 1998 but, despite locals' hopes, listing hasn't brought travellers to visit its famous Lake Te'Nggano. Rennell remains a remote and poorly serviced backwater where food can be scarce, fuel is expensive and there's poor infrastructure. You must be well provisioned with food and seriously cashed-up to visit the province.

Several bird species are endemic to Rennell, including the Rennell fantail and the rare Rennell white spoonbill. There are at least eight subspecies that have been identified. Dawn and dusk see great flocks of frigate birds, cormorants and boobies circling over Lake Te'Nggano. The unique Rennellese orchid is also beautiful.

RENNELL ISLAND

pop 1400 / area 276 sq km

Surrounded by high cliffs, Rennell is a fine example of a raised coral atoll. At 130 sq km, **Lake Te'Nggano**, in the southeast, is the South Pacific's largest expanse of fresh water. The lake is the old lagoon floor and the tall cliffs that surround it are the old reef. Its western end has 200-odd coral islets and swamps. Four villages lie along the shore, including **Te'Nggano**, the subprovincial headquarters.

Boat charters around the lake are available, and guided rainforest walks cost S\$30 per person per hour. **Octopus Cave** on the northern shore is a very popular excursion. From **Tuangonga Bay** it's possible to clamber up to the cliff top for an amazing view of the lake and ocean.

It's said that Rennell and Bellona were occupied by small, fur-covered, subhuman Hiti people living in caves when the Polynesians arrived around AD 1400. They were wiped out over the centuries although there are still occasional 'sightings'.

There is an Internet connection at **Hutuna** (hutuna@pifolfaetaem.gov.sb) where you might be able to contact the lodges. It's a changeable thing – apparently it does work sometimes. There's also *sometimes* radio contact – discuss this with the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551).

Sleeping

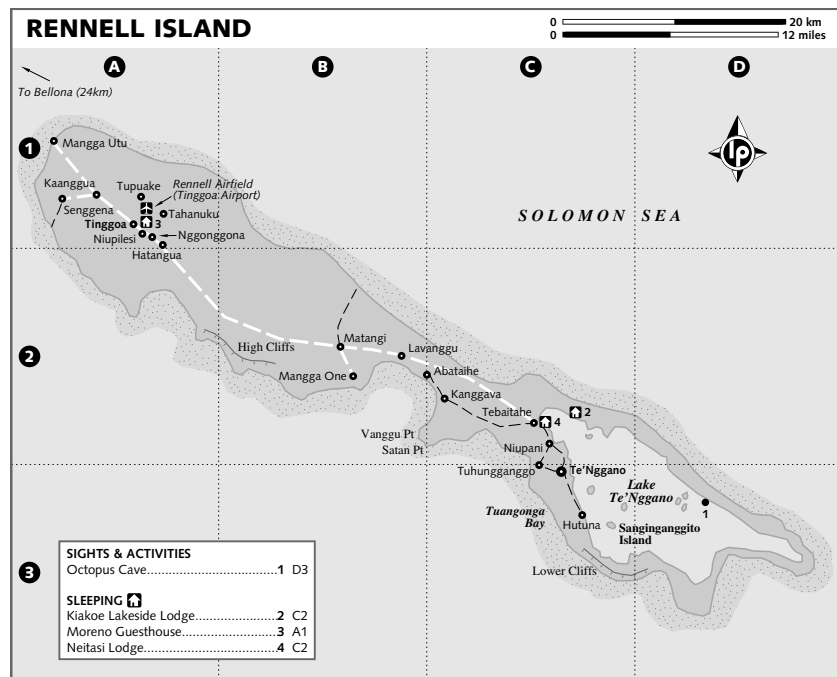
The island has a few simple resthouses which can be booked through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) if the local 'pifolfaetaem' email service is working. Alternatively, the visitor information centre can radio the subprovincial headquarters (once the radio tower is fixed) or even send a letter on a Solomon Airlines provincial flight. However, chances are you'll be making your accommodation arrangements 'on the fly' once you land in the province.

Moreno Guesthouse (per person S\$80) This is a clean, friendly place with shared kitchen facilities. It's near the airport and since flights depart Rennell early in the morning you'll need to stay here on the eve of your departure.

Other options:

Neitasi Lodge (per person S\$70) A lovely leafhouse constructed on stilts directly over the water.

Kiakoe Lakeside Lodge (per person S\$80) This place is on the northern shore. Canoe transfers are S\$30 per person.



Getting There & Away

From Honiara, **Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies to Rennell (from \$610) via Bellona (from \$740) on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. The Bellona–Rennell sector costs from \$5380. Rennell airfield is at Tinggoa.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The 50km of poor road between the Tinggoa Airport and Lake Te'Nggano runs through rainforest and takes at least four hours. Hilux 4WD charter costs \$1000, or you may be able to negotiate a 'fare' on another vehicle or hook up with some Ramsi personnel. The people from Kiakoe Lakeside Lodge meet most flights to collect cargo and offer transfers to the lake for \$250.

BELLONA

pop 1000 / area 15 sq km

Densely populated Bellona has a fertile interior and is encircled by forest-covered cliffs rising 30m to 70m. The cliffs are mostly easy to climb, unlike Rennell's.

Since the 1970s many Bellonese have reacted against Christianity, deserting the large church-dominated villages and returning to their traditional lands.

Bellona also has an email connection (bellona@polfastaem.gov.sb).

Sights

Bellona Island's most sacred ancient rituals took place at the Nggabengga site in **Matahenua**. Early Bellonese settlers lived in the caves around here, right up to the 1930s.

The **Tapuna** and **Saamoa Caves** are 1km north of Matangi. Hiti people are said to have lived in stone buildings inside them. Stone remains can still be seen in Tapuna Cave.

The Hiti Walls at **Ou'taha** are a weathered line of coral rocks – the remains of an up-lifted reef. The locals say that the Hiti built these huge coral structures before the first Polynesians arrived.

Sleeping

Suan Resthouse (per person \$590) This resthouse at Tangakitonga has a kitchen, and meals are available. Bicycle hire and hiking and

snorkelling trips with lunch included can be arranged.

Aotaha Cave Resort (per person \$5130) This is a well-organised village-based resort on Bellona's east coast that enjoys cool sea breezes. It's a beautiful place, set around caves in the base of cliff, and some of the beds are in the cave itself. Meals are available on request.

Getting Around

A tractor trail runs from Potuhenua in the northwest, Bellona's only anchorage, and continues to the southeastern tip at Ana'otango. The island's only vehicle meets every flight and ship, and shuttles passengers along its route.

MALAITA PROVINCE

pop 123,000 / area 4300 sq km

Malaita Province is by far the most densely populated part of the country. The population is all Melanesian except for approximately 2000 Polynesians who live on the faraway atolls of Ontong Java and Sikaiana.

MALAITA ISLAND

pop 90,000 / area 3840 sq km

Deep valleys, sharp ridges and fast-flowing rivers have always obstructed cross-island movement on Malaita, and so the Malaitians speak many different languages. Malaita's rugged highland interior rises to 1303m at Mt Kolovrat.

Malaitan people have long migrated to other parts of the Solomons, particularly to Guadalcanal. Even today, in the post Tension era, Malaitan people dominate Honiara and are over-represented in Solomons' business, politics and power. It was resentment towards these successes and

incursions that led to the ethnic tensions of the late 1990s (see p550). They are an aggressive, dynamic people with deep traditions, rich cultures and a history of anti-authoritarianism that manifested in the Kwaio Rebellion (see p545) and the postwar Marching Rule movement (p545).

Malaita Island is still largely traditional, incredibly wild and difficult to get around. It's a great place to 'get lost' in, staying out in the villages with the Malaitians who, despite their reputation, are generous, warm and engaging.

Malaita has artificial islands that support whole communities. It has sacred caves and rivers, and strong traditions in carving, seafaring, and animist and ancestor worship. The crowded artificial islands in Langa Langa and Lau Lagoons (see below) are highlights.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Solomon Airlines (☎ 40173) flies from Honiara to Auki (from \$5430) every day.

Boat

MV Pelican Express (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) runs from Honiara to Auki (\$140) on Friday and returns on Saturday; on Monday it runs from Honiara to Afio (\$180) near Malaita's southern tip, returning on Tuesday.

GETTING AROUND

Auki's Gwaunaru'u airfield is 10km from town. A ride into town costs \$20 on the Solomon Airlines bus that meets every flight.

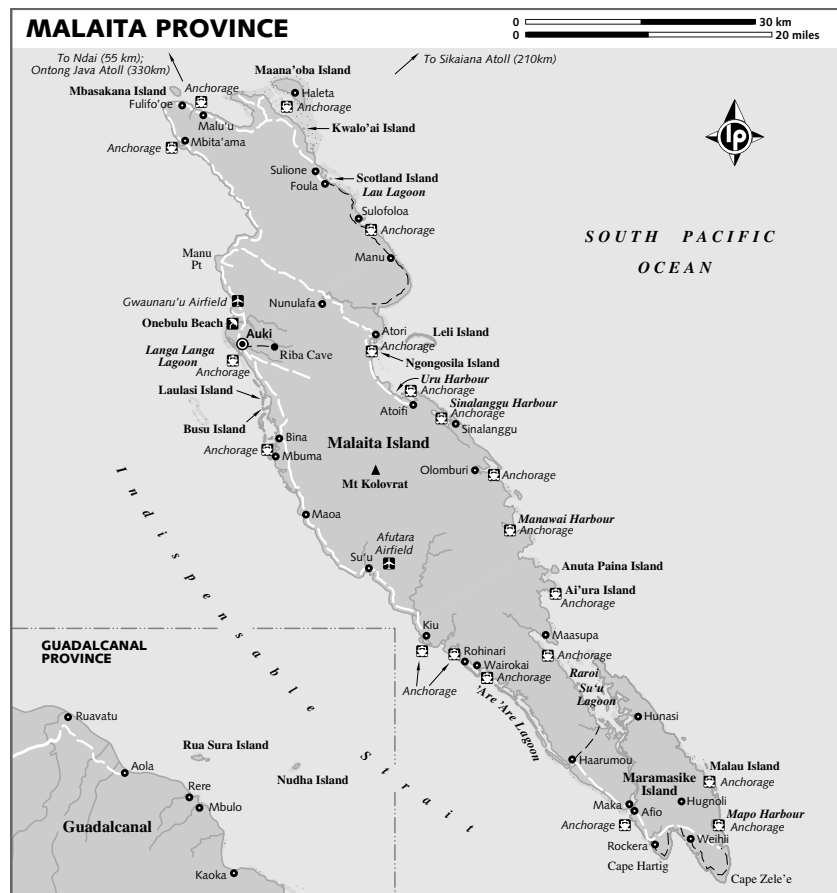
Very few vehicles travel Malaita's 325km of pot-holed roads outside Auki. The roads are genuinely appalling. Trucks leave carrying

ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS

Malaita has a large number of artificial islands, particularly in Langa Langa and Lau Lagoons. Some of these date from the 1550s and new ones are built each year.

Stones from the lagoon floor are collected and piled on a sandbar or reef until they reach around 2m above the high-tide mark. Sand is spread around, houses are built and coconuts palms are planted.

The largest islands exceed 1 sq km in size and tend to be very crowded; some are surrounded by a coral wall. Most, however, are very small and only have room for a few houses. Artificial islands were traditionally built as defence from head-hunters and tribal war.



people and goods up the 'north road' towards Malu'u from the wharfs in the early morning. Others leave for Foula and for Atori and Atoifi across the island.

AUKI

pop 4500

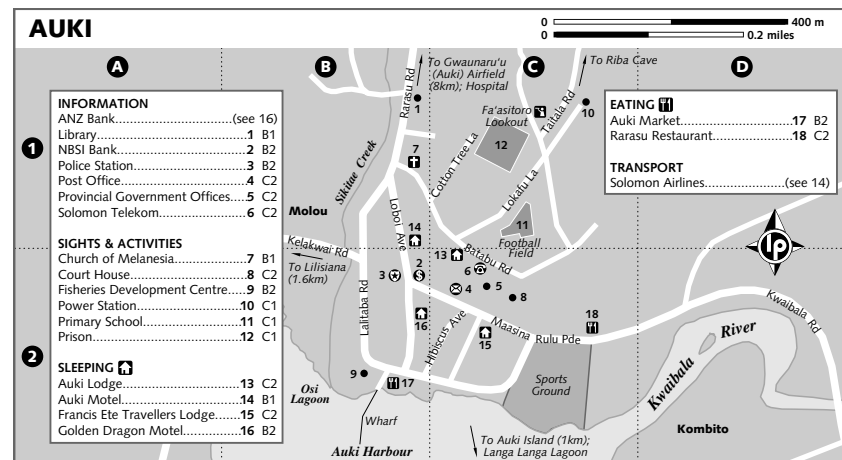
Although tiny, Auki is the Solomons' third-largest town. Along a few hundred metres of Lobi Ave, the main street, and in the blocks behind there are branches of the **ANZ** (☎ 40160) and **NBSI** (☎ 40484) banks, a hospital, provincial government offices, a **Telekom** (☎ 40152) and a **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 40173) office. There's also a wharf and lively market at the town's southern end, from where you can buy fresh food and see the harbour's

artificial islands. There are wonderful views over Auki and its harbour from the lookout behind the prison.

SIGHTS

The 80m-wide **Auki Island** lies 1km from town. The artificial island was home to shark worshippers and there are *kastom* areas containing ancestral skulls. Men can visit these sites but they remain *tabu* for women. Locals sometimes ask exorbitant landing fees – \$820 per person is reasonable. Canoes go to or past the island from the Auki Wharf, Lilišana and Ambu.

A 1.6km walk from the wharf is the friendly village of **Lilišana**, where women make traditional shell money and necklaces.



SLEEPING & EATING

Auki Lodge (☎ 40131; Batabu Rd; s/d from \$5290/320; ☼) There is a range of room types at Auki's top hotel. All have bathrooms and the better ones have fridge and kitchenette. The lodge is pretty run-down but there's a homy atmosphere and a broad veranda. There's a bar, a restaurant that serves good local food and a lounge area with satellite TV.

Auki Motel (☎ 40014; fax 40220; Lobi Ave; per person \$580, self-contained air-con d \$5200; ☼) The simple Auki Motel is basic but clean and decorated with Christian images and paraphernalia. The smoke- and alcohol-free rooms are fan-cooled and share facilities except for the two self-contained doubles. Excellent meals are served (breakfast/dinner \$525/40), and there's a spacious lounge and veranda that overlooks the main street – nice for watching the world go by. It's above the Solomon Airlines office.

Golden Dragon Motel (☎ 40113; Lobi Ave; per person \$5125, self-contained from \$5185) This place has a basic kitchen and communal lounge area. It's upstairs above some stores; if no-one's around ask at the Auki Store opposite.

Francis Ete Travellers Lodge (☎ 40320; fax 40105; Maasina Rulu Pde; per person \$580) This simple lodge has recently reopened after a few years' closure. It has fan-cooled rooms and share facilities and a dining room.

Rarasu Restaurant (☎ 40280; meals from \$440; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Recently established with assistance of the EU Micro Projects Programme, Rarasu is a terrific place and

offers the best dining in Auki. It's licensed and serves fish and stir-fries and chicken and beef dishes.

Around Auki

The large **Riba Cave** is an hour's walk east from Auki. There is a *kastom* fee and you'll need a guide and a torch. South of Auki, **Langa Langa Lagoon** is famous for its artificial islands. One of these, **Laulasi**, is 400 years old. Tours can be arranged in Auki; ask at your hotel. At the mouth of the Fiu River, 9km north of Auki, **Onebulu** is the best beach in the Auki area.

Northern Malaita Island

The 'north road' leaves Auki and follows the coast from Sisifu to Silolo, providing sea views. Long stretches of white-sand beach line the shore. Shell money is made at **Mbita'ama**, 65km from Auki. **Mana Ru-uakwa**, a marine cave at nearby Kwaiaurua Point, penetrates inland, terminating in a deep hole. Islanders say sharks come here to sleep. Beautiful **Mbasakana Island** is surrounded by coral reefs and white-sand beaches. The friendly villagers can show you an interesting cave nearby.

The welcoming subprovincial headquarters of **Malu'u** is a good stop on the 'north road' between Auki (five hours or 82km of dreadful road) and Lau Lagoon at the 'head road' two hours away. There are good beaches here and the village has stores, electricity and piped water. A 4km

hilltop trail behind Malu'u leads to **A'ama**, where there's a *biu* (a tree house for initiated boys). **Uala**, which has a skull house, is 1km further on. **Malu'u Lodge** (per person \$580) has some fan-cooled rooms, a kitchen and share facilities. Make bookings through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) or contact the **provincial government headquarters** (☎ 40253) in Auki.

This 35km-long **Lau Lagoon** contains more than 60 artificial islands (see p569 for more info on such islands). It stretches from the shallows between Uruuru and Maana'omba down to Lolowai.

Central & Eastern Malaita Island

There's a road across the mountainous interior to the east coast around Atori that is washed out in the mid-year wet season. The route begins near Dala, and its most scenic spot is at Nunulafa, where it crosses over the Auluta Gorge.

It's possible to visit the traditional Kwaio people who inhabit the rugged east-central part of Malaita and worship sharks. Shark-calling rituals climax with a boy sitting astride a shark and riding it around the lagoon. The Kwaio stronghold is between Uru Harbour and Olomburi. Check with the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551), which can give advice on guides and other matters.

SOLOMON ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The Tensions put paid to any investment in the hotel sector and standards have slipped – most places are in need of some fresh paint and new drapes. Honiara, Gizo and Auki provide a range of options, and the standards can be quite good. Elsewhere, most of the tourist accommodation comprises small, traditional-style lodges. Booking your accommodation ahead will enable your host to meet you at the airfield or port – useful where there's no public transport.

Pitching a tent flies in the face of traditional Melanesian hospitality, and villagers will be offended if you turn down their offer to sleep in a dwelling provided.

PRACTICALITIES

- The country's only newspaper is the daily *Solomons Star* (\$55), offering lively and independent commentary on Solomons affairs. It's delivered to the provincial capitals on the Sol Air flight and thus may not be available until after lunch or even the next day – back issues are sold in trade stores. It can be read online at www.solomonstarnews.com.
- Local radio (SIBC) broadcasts programmes in English and Pijin on MW (1035kHz) and SW (5020kHz), with local and overseas features and news. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is at 630kHz MW. There's no local TV. Hotels with satellite TV can pick up CNN, BBC World and Australian programmes, as well as EmTV from PNG.
- The Solomons uses the PAL video system.
- Where electricity exists (often delivered by generator), the Solomons uses 240V, 50Hz AC and Australian-style three-pin plugs.
- The Solomons uses the metric system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Hotels & Resorts

Tourist-class hotels are confined to Honiara, Gizo, Munda and Auki – expect to pay from \$200 for a fan-cooled room with private facilities in Honiara, and less on the outer islands. Although basic by international standards, these hotels generally have rooms with or without private shower and air-con, depending on how much you're prepared to pay. A telephone, TV and tea-and-coffee-making facilities may be provided. Most have restaurants and bars.

There are a few plush resorts in Honiara and Western Province – expect to pay from \$450 for a deluxe twin room at these places. Elsewhere accommodation is offered in basic leafhouse-style lodges.

Resthouses & Hostels

These comprise church hostels, provincial government resthouses and private resthouses. Most have ceiling fans and shared kitchen and washing facilities. They charge

around \$580 per person per night and most guests will be islanders. Alcohol and smoking are often forbidden.

Village Stays

Most villages have a leafhouse set aside for visitors' use. The charge is usually nominal. If there isn't a leafhouse, you may be able to bed down in the local school or clinic.

Villages rarely have electricity and the water supply often comes from a stream or communal tap. The toilet is a hole in the ground, or a reserved place in the bush or over the reef. Bring enough food to share around – tinned meat or tuna, tea, coffee and sugar are useful.

Village stays can be arranged with locals who have an idea of what tourists want and expect. Visiting on this basis is highly recommended – it is a wonderful experience for the traveller and it puts money into local communities. The World Heritage Committee and World Wildlife Fund have helped villagers set up several 'village-based' lodges around Marovo Lagoon (see p564).

Contact the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) if you want to stay in a village or a lodge. Staff can make suggestions and organise bookings.

ACTIVITIES

The Solomon Islands offers a range of outdoor activities, including hiking, kayaking, scuba diving, snorkelling, swimming, surfing, fishing, bird-watching and caving. There are also numerous archaeological and WWII sites to visit.

Golf, squash and tennis are played in Honiara and almost every village has a soccer (football) field.

Diving

The Solomons is among the world's top diving destinations; see p73 for an overview. The extensive coral and fish life alone are superb, but there are also hundreds of sunken WWII ships and aircraft. Many of these are accessible and, having been undisturbed for 60 years, have a wealth of objects *in situ*; underwater visibility is usually good to around 30m. Dive operators rent all equipment and you must carry your certification (see p78).

Water temperatures in the Solomons are perfectly comfortable without a wetsuit, but

be sure that you wear a rash vest or some other form of upper-body protection from sunburn and skin grazes.

Some of the major dive operators: **Bilikiki Cruises** (www.bilikiki.com) With two live-aboard cruisers.

Dive Gizo (www.divegizo.com) In Gizo and Munda, Western Province.

Dive Tulagi (www.tulagidive.com.sb) Based in the Nggelas.

Solomon Watersport (www.solomonwatersport.com) In Gizo.

Uepi Island Resort (www.uepi.com) At Marovo Lagoon.

PREARRANGED DIVE HOLIDAYS

Many divers prearrange their stay in the Solomons. Australian-based specialist companies offering package dive tours include the following:

Allways Dive Expeditions (☎ 03-9885 8863, toll free 1800 338 239; www.allwaysdive.com.au) In Ashburton, Victoria.

Dive Adventures (☎ 02-9299 4633, 03-9646 5945; www.diveadventures.com.au) In Sydney and Melbourne.

Diversio Dive Travel (☎ 07-4039 0200; www.diversioz.com) Based in Cairns, Queensland.

Fishing

Most resorts and lodges can arrange fishing trips, and several tour operators specialise in fishing. Zipolo Habu Resort (p564) is a specialist fishing resort. Sailfish, marlin, shark, tuna, kingfish, Spanish mackerel, barracuda and wahoo are common. Always ask permission before casting off from the shore into the sea or a river.

Hiking

The cooler mid-year months are most suitable for hiking. Most of the resorts and lodges offer walks up many of the nearby volcanoes. Climbing either Rendova Peak (p564) or Kolombangara (p562) involves a two-day hike, but their summits offer magnificent views.

Snorkelling

Snorkelling in the Solomons is excellent. The warm, clear water of the lagoons and the countless colourful fish and corals make it a real treat. It's a good idea to bring your own gear, although most dive shops have rental equipment. Dive operators typically charge around A\$40 for snorkelling trips.

Surfing

Surfing is just taking off in the Solomons and new breaks are being discovered all the time. The swell runs from October to April and can reach 2m or more at Pailongge on Ghizo, Lola Island in Vonavona Lagoon, at Poro on Santa Isabel and Tawarogha on Makira. The reef-breaks tend to be a long paddle from the shore, but the conditions can be excellent. Zipolo Habu Resort (p564) on Lola Island in Western Province offers surf charters, and Dive Gizo (p560) employs a couple of guys to help surfers find waves. Surfers should seek permission at the nearest village before entering the water. Bring your own boards.

BOOKS

Hector Hothouse's *White Headhunter – The Extraordinary True Story of a White Man's Life among Headhunters of the Solomon Islands* tells the story of the Scotsman John Renton who lived in Malaita from 1868 to 1875.

Lightning Meets the West Wind – The Malaita Massacre, by Roger Keesing and Peter Corris, is the story of William Bell, the Kwaio Rebellion and the brutal reprisals exacted on the Malaitan people by the British afterwards (see p545).

Books on the Solomons' experience in WWII include Eric Felot's *The Coast Watchers*, Richard F Newcomb's *Savo and Guadalcanal Diary* by Richard Tregaskis. *The Big Death – Solomon Islanders Remember WWII*, by Geoffrey M White and others, is a collection of stories told by islanders.

The Maasina Rule Movement, edited by Hugh Larcy, is about Malaita's postwar movement opposed to cooperation with the British authorities.

Happy Isles in Crisis by Clive Moore (2005) is the first comprehensive study of the events in Guadalcanal that led to the period of ethnic tension that paralysed the country. Moore discovers many deep historical roots to the problem.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banking hours in Honiara are from 8.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday (ANZ and Westpac open at 9am). Government offices open from 8am to noon and 1pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. Private businesses close half

an hour later and operate on Saturday until midday.

Most shops in town open from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday and until noon on Saturday – some open longer, including on Sunday.

CHILDREN

The Solomons is a great place to travel with children. Kids are an ever-present part of village life and foreign kids are quickly absorbed into the local activities. Don't be surprised to see your two-year-old being carried around on the hip of a local seven-year-old girl – child-rearing is a communal responsibility in the Solomons.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

In 1999 and 2000 Honiara was the scene of bloody fighting between the Guadalcanal Islanders and Malaitans (see the boxed text, p550). Despite the riots in April 2006 (see the boxed text, p555), the Solomons is generally a safe country to travel through, and violence or hostility towards expats or tourists is rare.

In 2005–06 independent travel on Guadalcanal was not recommended outside Honiara, although the capital itself was quite safe. Seek advice from the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) before venturing beyond the airport (11km east) and White River (4km west).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Solomon Islands Embassies & Consulates

Australia High Commission (☎ 02-6282 7030; info@solomon.emb.gov.au; PO Box 256, 1st fl, JAA Bldg, Unit 4/19 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT 2600); Consulate (☎ 02-9361 5866; fax 9361 5066; 5th fl, 376 Victoria St, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010); Consulate (☎ 03-8531 1000; fax 8531 1955; 1 Southbank Blvd, Melbourne, Victoria 3006)
EU (☎ 02-732 7085; 106255.2155@compuserve.com; Ave Edouard 17, 1040 Brussels, Belgium)
Japan (☎ 03-5275 0515; fax 222 5959 5960; 16-15 Kirakawa-cho, Z-Chome, Shiyoda-ku, Tokyo)
PNG (☎ 323 4333; sihicom@daltron.com.pg; PO Box 94, Unit 2, GB House, Port Moresby)

Embassies & Consulates in the Solomon Islands

Australia (☎ 21561; fax 23691; Mud Alley St, Honiara)
EU (☎ 22765; fax 23318; ecsol@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

France (☎ 22588; fax 23887; Tradco Office, City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

Germany (☎ 22588; fax 23887; Tradco Office, City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

Japan (☎ 22953; fax 21006; NPF Bldg, Honiara)

NZ (☎ 21561; fax 23691; City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

PNG (☎ 20561; fax 20562; Anthony Saru Bldg, Honiara)

UK (☎ 21705; fax 21549; Telekom House, Honiara)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Independence Day is the Solomon Islands' most important annual festival, with celebrations held all around the country. Annual holidays in the Solomons include New Year's Day, Easter, Whit Monday and Christmas; see p829 for details of regional holidays.

Queen's Birthday First Monday in June

Independence Day 7 July

National Thanksgiving Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Solomon Telekom has public email facilities in Honiara, Gizo, Munda and Auki – wherever there is a provincial Telekom office. Honiara has several Internet cafés (see p551).

The **People First project** (www.peoplefirst.net.sb) is an interesting and innovative undertaking designed to connect remote communities in the Solomons through the Internet. In some places where there are no telephone cables, shortwave radio is used as a means of delivering text-only email messages.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Most of the resorts and dive operators have websites or at least an advertising presence on the web.

Solomon Islands Department of Commerce (www.commerce.gov.sb) The country's official website has a number of useful links.

Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (www.visitsolomon.com.sb) The Solomons' official tourism promotion organisation has a new website.

MAPS

Ordnance Survey maps are available at Ministry of Lands & Housing offices in each provincial centre. The branch in Honiara (☎ 21511) has all of the Solomons' survey maps. Hema produces a map (1:1.2 million) of the Solomons that is widely available.

MONEY ATMs

There are only two ATMs in the country: at Honiara's ANZ and Westpac bank branches.

Credit Cards

The main tourist-oriented businesses accept credit cards, but elsewhere it's strictly cash. Westpac and ANZ banks give cash advances on credit cards; NBSI does not.

Currency

The Solomon Islands dollar (S\$) has taken a hammering against international currencies in recent years; exchange rates are given in the following table.

A supply of coins and small-denomination notes will come in handy in rural areas, at markets, and for bus and boat rides.

Country	Unit	Solomon Islands dollar
Australia	A\$1	S\$5.51
Canada	C\$1	S\$6.53
CFP zone	100 CFP	S\$7.68
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	S\$14.10
euro zone	€1	S\$9.16
Fiji	F\$1	S\$4.22
Japan	¥100	S\$6.41
NZ	NZ\$1	S\$4.62
Samoa	ST\$1	S\$2.52
Tonga	T\$1	S\$3.62
UK	£1	S\$13.29
USA	US\$1	S\$7.29
Vanuatu	100Vt	S\$6.66

Moneychangers

The National Bank of the Solomon Islands (NBSI), Westpac and ANZ will change money in most major currencies. The NBSI has a network of branches and agencies around the country; only the branches will change travellers cheques.

Taxes

There's a 10% government tax on hotel and restaurant prices, but more basic places often don't charge it. All prices given in this book are inclusive of tax.

Tipping & Bargaining

Tipping and bargaining are not traditionally part of Melanesian culture, but it's becoming increasingly acceptable to ask a

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper:** S\$5
- **Bottle of soft drink:** S\$5
- **Coffee:** S\$10 to S\$12
- **Single-tank scuba dive:** S\$400
- **Evening-meal course in a good restaurant:** S\$70 to S\$110

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** S\$6.50
- **1L bottled water:** S\$10 to S\$12
- **Stubbie of Solbrew beer:** S\$12 to S\$18
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** S\$35 to S\$50
- **Sausage in a bun:** S\$9

carver for a 'second price' (often they'll tell you both prices at the outset). Haggling is considered rude.

Travellers Cheques

Stick to the name brands: Visa, Amex and Thomas Cook. Travellers cheques in Australian dollars can be readily exchanged at hotel desks and even some businesses.

TELEPHONE

The Solomons' international telephone code is ☎ 677; there are no area codes.

Solomon Telekom (☎ 21576) operates the country's telephone system; a teleradio (radio telephone) network connects isolated communities. Public phones are reasonably common in the larger centres and phonecards are widely available – the local Telekom office is the place to go for your telephone requirements.

Mobile Phones

Prepaid SIM cards from Solomon Telekom are available for purchase, although there is no mobile signal outside Honiara.

Phonecards

The cheapest way to make an international telephone call is from a public telephone with a prepaid phonecard. It's an excellent service, and cardphones are rapidly superseding coin phones right across the country.

TIME

Time in the Solomons is officially 11 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Local time is the same as in Vanuatu, one hour ahead of Australian Eastern Standard Time, and one hour behind Fiji and NZ. There's no daylight saving. When it's noon in the Solomons it's 1am in London, 5pm the previous day in Los Angeles, 2pm in Auckland and 11am in Sydney.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

The **Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau** (SIVB; ☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb; Mendana Ave, Honiara) has little printed material to give you but the staff can contact isolated lodges and villages to make bookings.

VISAS

Every visitor must have a valid passport, onward ticket and adequate funds.

In theory, entry visas are not required – visitor permits for up to three months are granted upon arrival. The guidelines are ambiguous for nationals from former or continuing communist countries, the Indian subcontinent, Nauru and Kiribati. Nationals from these places should seek advice from a Solomon Islands embassy before travelling.

Visitor permits can be extended for three months at the **Immigration Department** (☎ 22585) in Honiara.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

It's not usual for local young women to be out at night by themselves. Exercise normal caution in Honiara – after dark, take a taxi and stay in busy areas. Female tourists swimming or sunbathing alone at isolated beaches might attract unwanted attention.

Foreign women travelling solo around remote villages are very rare. In villages male travellers are sometimes accommodated in structures that are *tabu* for women, so it might not be possible for couples to sleep together. There may be other areas that women are not allowed to see, and these should be respected.

Melanesians are very sensitive about the show of female thighs so shorts and skirts should be knee-length and swimwear should incorporate boardshorts rather than bikini bottoms.

TRANSPORT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

The Solomons' only international airport is Henderson Airport (code HIR), 11km east of Honiara.

There are few direct flights to the Solomons – only Brisbane and Port Moresby currently have services to Honiara, and flights from these destinations are expensive. See p837 for details of air passes that include the Solomons.

Qantas no longer flies to Honiara. Solomon Airlines no longer has any aircraft other than its small domestic fleet. Air Nauru was flying Brisbane–Honiara four times a week with connections to Fiji, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, but it had its solitary Boeing 737 confiscated by US authorities after reneging on financial arrangements.

At the time of writing Air Nauru was looking to renegotiate leasing arrangements on aircraft and fly these sectors again.

Solomon Airlines has offices in Nadi (☎ 722 831), Fiji; and Port Moresby (☎ 325 5724), PNG. It also has sales agents in Suva (☎ 315 889), Fiji; Noumea (☎ 28 66 77), New Caledonia; and Port Vila (☎ 23838), Vanuatu.

ASIA

The most direct route to/from Asia is via Port Moresby in PNG (opposite) or Nadi (opposite) in Fiji, though it may be simpler and cheaper and connections may be more frequent going via Brisbane.

AUSTRALIA

Solomon Airlines (www.solomonairlines.com.au; ☎ in Brisbane 07-3407 7266, in Sydney 02-9244 2189, in Melbourne 03-9920 3872) sells the Brisbane–Honiara sectors (one way/return A\$780/1040 plus A\$190 tax) on Air Vanuatu flights

DEPARTURE TAX

An airport tax of S\$40 is charged for passengers boarding international flights leaving Honiara.

to Port Vila every Saturday, Tuesday and Thursday, returning the next day.

FIJI

Air Vanuatu (www.airvanuatu.com) connects Honiara with Nadi, routed via Port Vila, on Monday. The one-way/return fare is A\$890/1110 including tax. The Fiji sales agent is **Air Fiji** (☎ 679-672 3822).

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Air Niugini (www.airniugini.com.pg) flies from Port Moresby to Honiara on Monday and Friday. One-way/return fares are A\$920/1090 including tax. Contact the Port Moresby main sales office on ☎ 675-325 9084.

VANUATU

An Air Vanuatu plane operated by **Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies from Port Vila to Honiara on Monday and Thursday. One-way/return fares are A\$650/1270 including tax. To book, contact Air Vanuatu (the Solomon Airlines agent) in Port Vila on ☎ 678-23838.

Sea**YACHT**

The Solomons is a favourite spot for yachters who take refuge in the lagoons during cyclone season. Along with Honiara, Korovou (Shortland Islands), Gizo, Ringgi, Yandina, Tulagi Island and Graciosa Bay are official ports of entry where you can clear customs and immigration. There's a S\$100 fee for sailing in Solomon waters.

'Crew wanted' notices are posted at the **Point Cruz Yacht Club** (☎ 22500) in Honiara. See p842 for more about yachting in the Pacific.

GETTING AROUND**Air**

Solomon Airlines (☎ 20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au; Mendana Ave, Honiara) services the country's 20-odd airstrips with its De Havilland Twin Otters and Britton Norman Islanders. Baggage allowance is set at 20kg per passenger. Be sure to confirm your flight at least 24 hours before your departure. Domestic airfares in this chapter include S\$160 in taxes. Note that travelling by boat is less expensive than flying between islands.

Boat**DINGHIES**

Outboard-powered dinghies are the most common means of transport in the Solomons, supplying goods to stores all over the country. People pay a fare to travel a sector. Charters cost around S\$1000 per day for the boat and a driver, but maybe not fuel (S\$20 per litre in remote areas).

INTER-ISLAND SHIPS

Most shipping companies have offices near Honiara's main wharf. Getting around by freighter is a *slow* process.

Wings Shipping (Honiara ☎ in Honiara 22811) services the Western Province and Malaita, **Trans West Shipping** (☎ in Gizo 60240; fax 60421) goes to the Western Province and Choiseul, and the **Isabel Development Corporation** (☎ in Honiara 22126; fax 22009) goes to Santa Isabel.

PASSENGER BOATS

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) is an excellent service between Honiara, Western Province and Malaita. In Western Province **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180) offers a regular shuttle between Munda and Gizo.

Bus

Public minibuses are only found in Honiara. The flat S\$3 fare will take you anywhere on the route, which is written on a placard behind the windscreen of the bus. Elsewhere, people pile into open-backed trucks or tractor-drawn trailers.

Car & Motorcycle

The country has around 1300km of generally dreadful roads. International driving permits are accepted, as are most driving licences. Driving is on the left side of the road.

Hire cars are only available in Honiara (see p553).

Hitching

If you want a ride through the countryside, flag down a passing vehicle and ask the driver the cost of a lift. In rural areas most vehicles double as public transport.

Local Transport**TAXI**

Taxis are plentiful in Honiara and there are small fleets in Gizo and Auki. They don't have meters, so agree on the price before you set off. The fare to the airport from Honiara is S\$50.

Tahiti & French Polynesia

Better known by the name of its main island, Tahiti, French Polynesia is a mesmerising wonderland of reef-fringed islands and translucent aqua lagoons. Shamelessly chic and seductive, it's the kind of place where the rich and famous come to play and hedonistic honeymoon fantasies are realised. The epitome of the Pacific dream, this is one Garden of Eden so damn beautiful it's hard to believe it really exists.

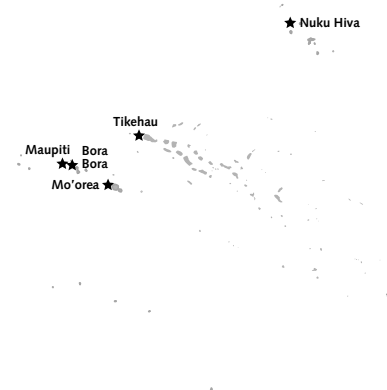
French Polynesia is more than just some souped up, sexy honeymoon destination, however. Those seeking something stronger than a pina colada in the sand will find salvation never more than a boat ride away. Adventures are plentiful in these archipelagos scattered over an area as big as Europe. Take an old school pirate romp through the mysterious and danger-tinged Tuamotus, where the breathtaking turquoise sea is home not only to flawless black pearls, but also hundreds of toothy sharks. Travel to the ends of the earth, destination Australs, a place so remote centuries slide by without anyone batting an eye. Check out the magnificent Gambier Archipelago: an armchair destination for most, it's also a must for wannabe National Geographic explorers. Those searching for a little less swashbuckling and a lot more room service will delight in Bora Bora's luxurious pampering and lush good looks; in Maupiti's picture-perfect views and old-fashioned French hospitality.

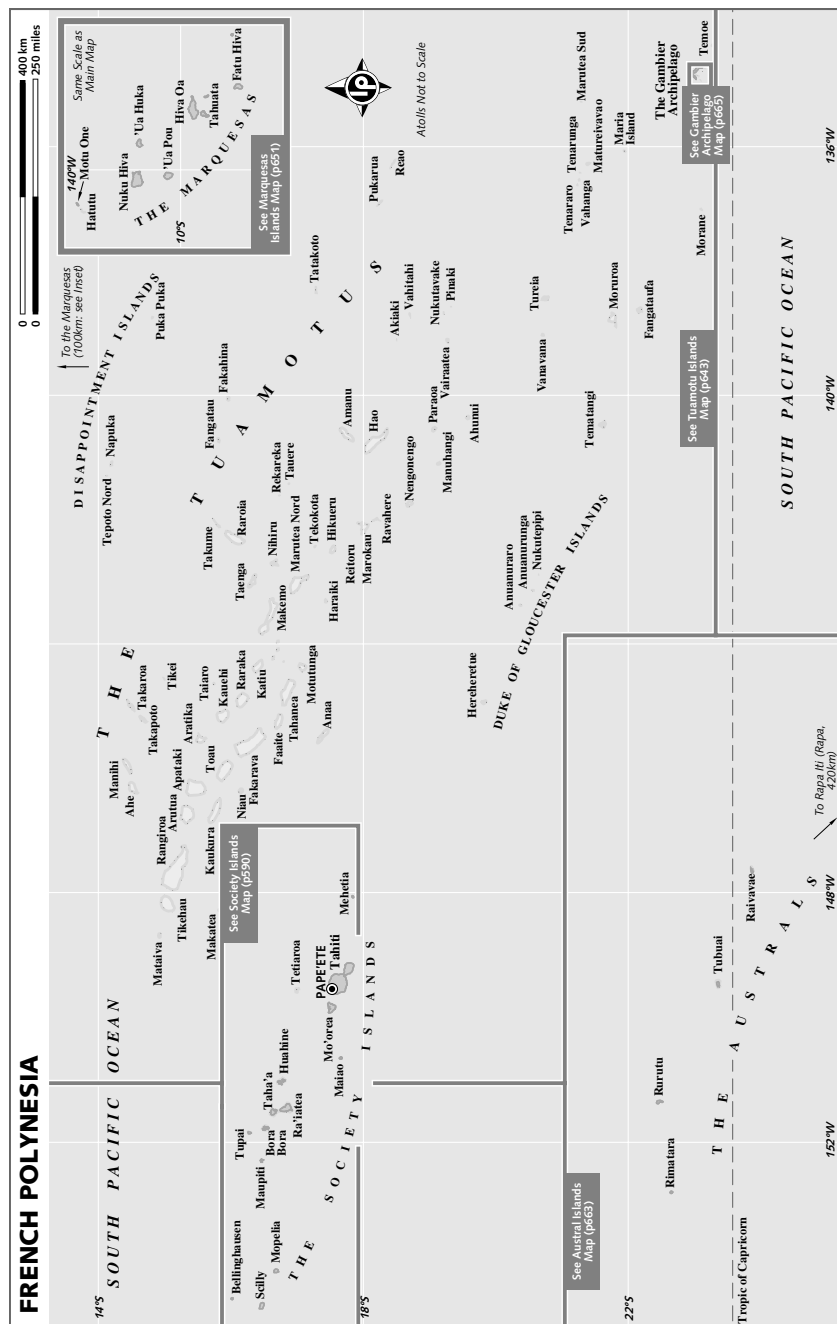
The truth is, whether you've secretly fantasised about splitting coconuts with your bare hands in a Rambo meets Robinson Crusoe scenario or daydreamed about playing heroine in a mushy Hollywood movie, French Polynesia tempts you to dream your wildest of fantasies right into punch-drunk reality.

French Polynesia comprises five main island groups – the Society Islands, the Tuamotus, the Marquesas, the Australs and the Gambier Archipelago. Tahiti is in the Society Islands.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pamper yourself on ultra gorgeous and over-the-top luxurious **Bora Bora** (p631), a temple to high-octane hedonism
- Relax on beautiful **Maupiti** (p639), the Society Islands' most unspoilt natural phenomenon
- Get lost in **Mo'orea's** (p604) entrancing history and luscious scenery
- Meander along postcard perfect empty beaches and snorkel in the translucent waters of **Tikehau** (p647) in the Tuamotus
- Hike the desert coasts and fecund valleys of **Nuku Hiva** (p652) in the wild and rugged Marquesas





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The dry winter period from May to October is the best time to visit; the weather is cooler and there is much less rainfall. Temperatures rise during the November to April summer rainy season when it's humid, cloudy and very wet. Three-quarters of the annual rainfall occurs during this period, generally in the form of brief, violent storms, although torrential rains lasting several days are not uncommon.

French Polynesia is south of the equator, but school holidays fall in line with those of the northern hemisphere. This means the peak season is July and August, and during this period it's no mean feat getting flights and accommodation. Christmas to early January, late February and early March, the Easter period, early May and early October are also quite busy times. The peak July–August season coincides with the Heiva festival (see p670), held throughout July, when the region comes to life.

Diving is popular year-round, and each season brings its share of discoveries. Surfing is also a year-round activity, but if you are sailing, it's best if you avoid the November to March tropical depressions. Walking is best in the dry season, as some of the trails are simply impassable when it's wet. Check out p827 to see French Polynesian climate charts.

HISTORY

No-one really knows why early peoples migrated here or even where they came from. Modern theories have Polynesian voyages originating from the Philippines or Indonesia, spurred on by territorial disputes or

overpopulation. Whatever the reason, ancient Polynesians packed up their outriggers with coconuts, *uru* (breadfruit), taro, sugar cane, dogs, pigs and chickens and headed out into the blue. These were feats of maritime prowess, not to be matched by Europeans for more than 1000 years.

European Arrival

European explorers first ventured into the region in 1595, although major expeditions didn't really get underway until the late 18th century. Lacking the navigation methods that Polynesians had developed over millennia of Pacific travel, the Europeans searched for islands in the Pacific by means of a rather random needle-in-a-haystack method.

MENDAÑA & QUIRÓS

In 1595 Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra came upon the Marquesas Islands on his second search for Terra Australis Incognita, the nonexistent great southern continent. Mendaña named the islands after his patron, Marquesas de Mendoza, but his visit resulted in open warfare and 200 islanders were killed.

Mendaña's pilot, Pedro Fernández de Quirós, returned in 1606 and discovered the Tuamotus before sailing to Vanuatu.

WALLIS

The *Dolphin* anchored at Matavai Bay in Tahiti's lagoon in late June of 1767. A quarter of the crew was down with scurvy and Samuel Wallis himself was incapacitated during most of his visit. Initially, the arrival was greeted with fascination as hundreds of canoes carrying young women 'who played a great many droll wanton tricks'. When the locals' fascination turned to fear, Wallis began by firing grapeshot at the Tahitians and finished by sending a party ashore to destroy homes and canoes. The natives suddenly became more friendly and a trade relationship developed: the crew was desperate for fresh supplies and the Tahitians, who had not yet discovered metals, were delighted to receive knives, hatchets and nails in exchange.

Wallis only stayed in Matavai Bay for a few weeks, just long enough to name the island King George's Land and to claim it for Britain.

TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Pape'ete (Tahiti)
- **Population:** 245,405
- **Land area:** 3500 sq km
- **Number of islands:** 118
- **International telephone code:** 689
- **Currency:** Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)
- **Languages:** Tahitian, French and English
- **Greeting:** *la ora na* (Tahitian), *Bonjour* (French)
- **Website:** www.tahiti-tourisme.com

BOUGAINVILLE

With his ships *La Boudeuse* and *L'Étoile*, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville arrived on Tahiti in April 1768, less than a year after Wallis. At this time Wallis was still home-ward bound, so Bougainville was completely unaware he was not the first European to set eyes on the island. His visit only lasted nine days, but Bougainville was a more cultured, considered man than Wallis and had no unfriendly clashes with the Tahitians.

Bougainville explained that the Tahitians 'pressed us to choose a woman and come on shore with her; and their gestures, which were not ambiguous, denoted in what manner we should form an acquaintance with her'. Bougainville's reports of Venuslike women with 'the celestial form of that goddess', and of the people's uninhibited attitude towards matters sexual, swept through Paris like wildfire.

Unaware that the Union Jack had already flown over the island, Bougainville took time out to claim Tahiti for France but, like Wallis, he was soon overshadowed when the greatest Pacific explorer of them all, James Cook, arrived on the scene.

COOK

In three great expeditions between 1769 and 1779, James Cook filled the map of the Pacific so comprehensively that future expeditions were reduced to joining the dots. Cook was sent to the Pacific with two ambitious tasks. One, which was for the Royal Society, was to observe the transit of Venus as it passed across the face of the sun. By timing the transit from three very distant places it was hoped that the distance from the earth to the sun could be calculated. Tahiti was selected as one of the three measuring points (the other two were in Norway and Canada). Cook's second objective was to hunt for the mythical great continent of the south. The instruments of the time proved to be insufficiently accurate to achieve Cook's first objective, but Cook's expeditions did yield impressive scientific work.

BOENECHEA

Already firmly established in South America, the Spanish looked upon the Pacific as their back yard and were less than happy to hear about other European navigators' visits. In 1772 Don Domingo de Boenechea sailed the

Aguilla from Peru and anchored in the lagoon off Tautira on Tahiti Iti (Small Tahiti). For the third time, the island was claimed by a European nation. Boenechea installed two inept missionaries and established Tautira as the first long-term European settlement on the island.

In 1775 the *Aguilla* again returned from Peru. The two Spanish missionaries, who had been spectacularly unsuccessful at converting 'the heathen', and who from all reports were terrified of the islanders, were more than happy to scuttle back to Peru. Boenechea died on Tahiti during this visit, and thus ended Spanish rule on Tahiti.

Bounty Mutineers

In 1789 the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty* occurred after Bligh's crew had spent six long comfortable months on Tahiti. See p424 for more about the *Bounty*.

After the mutiny the mutineers returned to Tahiti and Tubuai in the Australs before sailing to a more remote hideaway on Pitcairn Island. Sixteen stayed behind on Tahiti, a move that changed the course of history.

Before the Europeans arrived power had been a local affair. No ruler was strong enough to control more than a patch of land, and Tahiti was divided into a number of squabbling groups. However, once they realised the persuasive power of European weaponry, Tahitians pressed the *Bounty* mutineers to take sides in local conflicts. The mutineers became mercenaries to the highest bidder, the Pomare family.

That deal was the beginning of the Pomares' metamorphosis into a ruling dynasty. Pomare I, known as Tu, controlled most of Tahiti by the time he died in 1803; his son Pomare II took over.

Whalers, Missionaries & Depopulation

The London Missionary Society (LMS) landed at Tahiti's Point Vénus in March 1797 and did its best to rid the islanders of their wicked ways. Dancing, 'indecent' songs, tattoos, nudity, indiscriminate sex and even wearing flowers in the hair were banned once the missionaries got their patron, Pomare II, on their side.

Whalers and traders arrived in Polynesia in the 1790s, spreading diseases, encouraging prostitution and introducing alcohol and more weapons.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

French Polynesia is ridiculously expensive by anyone's standards, so it's only fair to know what you're getting into before shelling out the big bucks.

While never cheap, French Polynesia can be done on a budget and backpackers who've travelled here find they can scrape by on a slightly fat shoestring (expect to shell out about 5000 CFP per person per day) if they're willing to camp and cook. Some of the large islands also offer hostel-style digs with communal kitchens and bunk-bed dorms. Even if you don't consider yourself a starving student, French Polynesia may seem a little too expensive for anyone other than the world's wealthiest. But while it is possible to blow US\$10,000 in one night on an over-water suite, mere mortals can find cosy family *pensions* (guesthouses) and affordable hotels on even the ritziest islands. Midrange travellers staying in more comfortable digs and wanting to take in a few restaurant meals and perhaps an organised excursion can count on about US\$200 per couple per day. For top-end visitors the sky's the limit – with endless imaginative ways to lighten your wallet.

To score the best deals, you'll need to plan in advance. Start thinking about your trip around three to six months out and definitely devote some serious hours to Web research. From complete honeymoon packages to discounts on budget-oriented family guesthouses to Internet-only deals on luxury resorts, there are loads of Internet sites offering everything Tahiti on sale.

Whatever your budget, however, sadly you'll find taxation is another bugbear here: a TVA (*taxe sur la valeur ajoutée*; value-added tax), which was introduced in 1998, currently adds 6% to your hotel bill (and that's not including the 5% government tax and the *taxe de séjour*, accommodation tax or daily tax, which top off the bill). The prices quoted in this chapter include taxes.

Best Over-the-Top Lux Resorts

If you're going to really splurge, French Polynesia just might be the best place in the world to do it. The following places are the best of the best.

- Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora (p636)
- Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort (p608)
- Hotel Bora Bora (p636)
- Bora Bora Lagoon Resort (p636)
- Mo'orea Pearl Resort & Spa (p608)
- Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa (p637)
- Bora Bora Pearl Beach Resort (p637)
- Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort, Tuamotus (p647)
- Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (p630)
- Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (p600)

Best Value Accommodation

The following are our top picks for good value; they are not necessarily the cheapest places, they simply have the best cost to worth ratio.

- Fare Ie Huahine (p622)
- Pension Mauarii, Huahine (p622)
- Vanira Lodge, Tahiti (p601)
- Pension Poe Iti, Maupiti (p641)
- Pension Henri, Rangiroa (p645)
- Village Pauline, Bora Bora (p635)
- Mark's Place Paradise, Mo'orea (p609)
- Pension Kanahau, Hiva Oa (p660)
- Tarariki Village, Mo'orea (p609)
- Novatel Bora Bora Hotel & Beach Resort (p636)

Plagued by diseases against which they had no natural immunity, the population plummeted. When Cook first visited, Tahiti's population was about 40,000. In 1800 it was less than 20,000 and by the 1820s it was down to around 6000. In the Marquesas the situation was even worse – the population dropped from 80,000 to only 2000 in one century.

Pomares & the Missionaries

After 1815 the Pomares ruled Tahiti, with Protestant missionaries advising them on government and laws and trying to keep whalers and Australian traders at arm's length. Pomare II died in 1821 leaving his son Pomare III to rule until his death six years later in 1827, at which point the

young Queen Pomare IV assumed the throne.

The queen's missionary advisers, seeing her only as an interim ruler until the next king arrived, turned a blind eye to some of her youthful excesses. She wasn't averse to a little singing and dancing, and even visited passing ships. Queen Pomare IV made the most of her leeway and ruled Tahiti for 50 years.

English Protestant missionaries were the major advisers to chiefs in the Society, Austral and Tuamotu Islands. But in the Gambier Archipelago and the Marquesas Islands French Catholic missionaries were in control. In 1836 two French missionaries, Laval and Caret, visiting Pape'ete from the Gambier Archipelago were caught up in this rivalry when the British promptly arrested and deported them.

French Takeover

The French saw the deportation of Laval and Caret as a national insult. Demands, claims, counterclaims, payments and apologies shuttled back and forth. In 1842 Admiral Dupetit-Thouars settled matters by turning up in *La Reine Blanche* and pointing the ship's guns at Pape'ete, forcing Queen Pomare to yield. French soldiers promptly landed, along with Catholic missionaries.

The French arrested and deported George Pritchard, the British missionary who was the queen's consul and unofficial chief adviser. Queen Pomare, still hoping for British intervention, fled to Ra'iatea in 1844 and a guerrilla rebellion broke out on several islands. The rebels were subdued and by 1846 France controlled Tahiti and Mo'orea. The queen returned to Tahiti in 1847 as a mere figurehead.

Queen Pomare died in 1877; her son, Pomare V, had little interest in the position and abdicated in 1881. French power extended to include most of the other Society Islands in 1888, although rebellions continued to rumble on Ra'iatea until almost the end of the century. The Gambier Archipelago was annexed in 1881 and the Austral Islands in 1900/01.

20th Century

Soon after the turn of the century an economic boom attracted colonists, mostly French. By 1911 there were about 3500 Europeans in the islands, adding to Chinese

immigration, which had begun in 1864 with cotton production at Atimaono on Tahiti. The foundations of a multiethnic society were in place.

French Polynesia was directly involved in both world wars. In WWI almost 1000 Tahitian soldiers fought in Europe, and on 22 September 1914 two German cruisers patrolling the Pacific sank the French cruiser *Zélée* and shelled the Pape'ete market. In WWII 5000 US soldiers were based on Bora Bora, and a 2km runway was built in 1943. Tahitian volunteers in the Pacific Battalion fought in North Africa and Europe.

In 1946 the islands became an overseas territory within the French Republic, sparking agitation for independence. A political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes (RDPT; Democratic Assembly of Tahitian Populations) took centre stage on the political scene for about 10 years.

On 22 July 1957 the territory officially became French Polynesia. The 1960s were a real turning point. In 1961 Faa'a airport was built, opening French Polynesia to the world. Shortly after, the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty* on Tahiti poured millions of dollars into the economy. In 1963 the nuclear-testing Centre Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP; Pacific Experimentation Centre) was established at Moruroa and Fangataufa.

From 1977 to 1996 French Polynesia took over internal management and autonomy. The nuclear testing of the era shook Polynesia physically, socially and economically: violent protests rocked Pape'ete in 1987 and 1995 and the CEP made French Polynesia economically dependent on France. The end to nuclear testing in 1996 also meant the end of the prosperity of the previous 30 years.

French Polynesia Today

Over the last few decades, French Polynesia's control over its own government and resources has been widened. Although independence from France is a possibility in the future, it is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Funds sent from France to help French Polynesia develop its own industries to work towards economic independence were mostly squandered by the self-serving Flosse regime. Oscar Temaru's new politic to actually help his country's independent economy, receives little support from France

and Flosse's cronies are constantly setting road blocks to make the new regime look incompetent. At the time of writing, Temaru's chance of remaining in office was shaky.

The standard of living in the region is relatively high, and access to adequate health care and fresh water is improving, but French Polynesia is in a vulnerable economic situation, with very few natural resources to draw upon and a system based on imports. The impact of El Niño, felt strongly in French Polynesia as in other parts of the Pacific in 2000–01, serves as a reminder of how small Pacific nations are at the mercy of the large industrialised and polluting nations.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

If French Polynesia had a national slogan it might be *haere maru* (take it slow) words that often fall off the lips of Tahitians when addressing their busy French and Chinese cohabitants. It's hard not to take it slow in the islands. With one road encircling the main island of Tahiti, it's easy to get caught driving behind an old pick-up truck at 40km/h with no chance of passing; national holidays seem to close up the shops and banks once every week or so and getting served in a restaurant can take an eternity. This can be frustrating to anyone in a hurry, but somehow it all works out: you make it to wherever you were going even if it did take twice as long, the bank can wait till tomorrow and your food arrives once you are really, really hungry. The Tahitian people know this and always seem slightly amused by anyone who tries to break the rhythm of calm.

Regardless of 'Tahiti time', Pape'ete manages to move at a pace fitting for a capital: there are traffic jams, everyone is on a mobile phone (cellphone) and the nightlife shakes on till 5am. The modern world is quickly infiltrating the slow pace of life and this is most evident in the younger generations.

Lifestyle

The traditional Tahitian family is a fluid, open-armed force that is the country's backbone. Although modern girls are increasingly less likely to stay home and have baby after baby, an accidental pregnancy is considered more of a blessing than a hindrance and babies are passed along to another eager, infant-loving family member. This

unattached attitude to allow a child to be raised by whoever will provide the most love has brought many hopeful adoptive parents to Tahiti from France and few leave empty handed. *Faamu* (adopted children) are not thought of as different from blood brothers and sisters to either the parents or siblings although the real mother, and occasionally the father, sometimes remain a peripheral part of the child's life.

This family web is vitally important to an individual. When people first meet, the conversation usually starts with questions about family and most people are able to find a common relative between themselves within minutes. This accomplished, they are 'cousins' and fast friends. The flip side is many new couples find out too late they are *tapu* (taboo), too closely related for the family to accept.

It's not all roses in what appears to be such a warm, fuzzy family framework. Domestic violence and incest are prevalent. This is closely connected with high rates of alcoholism. The government has launched numerous programmes addressing these issues but little progress has been made.

Despite these domestic problems, women do hold a strong position in French Polynesian society. Wallis' first encounter with

GENDER BENDER Celeste Brash

You'll find that some women serving food in restaurants, working at hotels or in boutiques, aren't actually women at all. *Mahu*, males who are raised as girls and continue to live their lives as women, were present when the first Europeans arrived in the islands. Although the missionaries did their hardest to halt this 'unnatural crime', *mahu* are still an accepted part of the community today.

According to François Bauer, author of *Raerae de Tahiti*, popular belief has it that among a family with eight children, one will inevitably be a *mahu*. It remains unclear, however, whether this practice has a sexual or a social origin, but it is generally assumed to be the latter as *mahu* don't necessarily have sex with men. Even so, anyone seeking the mythical notion of a sexually free Tahiti should note that most of French Polynesia's modern day prostitutes are (very convincing) transvestites.

someone he believed to be a Tahitian chief turned out to be a woman. Today Nicole Bou-teau, one of Tahiti's newest political stars, has started her own centrist political party that is rapidly gaining popularity. In the household, women are most often the homemakers, but they don't wear this hat lightly. They radiate a strength and dignity that sees them in charge of everything domestic and sometimes more. Men (particularly those who don't drink) often share in the chores of cooking, cleaning and baby rearing; it's not uncommon to see massive, muscular, tattooed men nuzzling with an infant or holding hands with a toddler to cross the road.

Although religion has been teaching people to think otherwise, homosexuality is generally viewed as a natural part of human existence. This tolerance is displayed most strongly by the presence of *mahu* (sometimes called *raerae*) men who dress and live their lives as women (see p585). Lesbians are more rare and generally live in or around Pape'ete.

Pakalolo (marijuana), and the Bob Marley lifestyle, have been thoroughly embraced in French Polynesia but harder drugs are rare. The exception is Ice, a highly addictive meta-amphetamine that has rapidly gained popularity in the upper classes of Pape'ete. The government has responded with an impressive effort that will hopefully curb the problem before it becomes too serious.

Population

Paralleling worldwide patterns of urbanisation, French Polynesia's people have migrated towards the city and main island; 69% of the population currently make their home on Tahiti and 75% of those on Tahiti live in Pape'ete or its suburbs. While a few atolls in the Tuamotus continue to pull in new residents for work in the Tahitian pearl industry, most islands in the Tuamotus, Gambier, Marquesas and the Australs have dismal growth rates below 1%. The Society Islands' Leeward Islands – especially ones with a bigger tourist industry such as Bora Bora, Huahine and Ra'iatea – are growing at the same steady rate as the Windward Islands (which include Tahiti and Mo'orea). Island birth rates are dropping steadily, although are still relatively high at 17.7 per 1000 (it's around 13 per 1000 in Australia and France), down from 20.4 in 2001.

On all the islands the majority of the population lives in coastal zones. The rugged interior is virtually uninhabited but archaeological evidence indicates that this wasn't always the case. Only in the Marquesas do people live mostly in the valleys; this is a habit left over from times when living near the beach left them more vulnerable to warring neighbouring tribes.

ARTS

The zealous missionaries endeavoured to wipe out all forms of 'primitive' Polynesian art and culture. They destroyed temples and carvings, banned tattooing and dancing, and generally took a lot of the joy out of life. Fortunately some traditions survived this period of cultural censorship, and in recent years there has been a revival of Polynesian culture, particularly in music, dance and tattooing.

Cinema

There's a dearth of films made about or set in French Polynesia. Tahiti's role as a movie backdrop is almost exclusively tied up with the film *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The story has been told three times on the silver screen. Starring Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson, the 1980s third remake was the best of the bunch and was filmed almost entirely on Mo'orea. Anthony Hopkins plays the not-quite-so-bad-and-mad Bligh and Mel Gibson is the more-handsome-than-ever Christian. The scenery on Mo'orea looks fantastic.

James Michener's *South Pacific* may have been about Polynesia, but it certainly wasn't filmed there. *Tabu*, released in 1931, was filmed on Bora Bora. This work of fiction explores the notions of *tapu*, and when one of the directors was killed in an accident shortly after finishing filming, there was plenty of speculation that his death may have been the result of including taboo parts of the island in the film.

In 1979 a big-budget remake of *Hurricane*, the 1937 classic based on a Nordhoff & Hall novel, was filmed on Bora Bora. The film was a major flop, despite an all-star cast; for TV it was retitled *Forbidden Paradise*.

Dance

The dances visitors see in French Polynesia are not created for tourists; they are authentic performances and play a major part in

spreading the influence of Tahitian culture abroad. In this land of oral traditions, dance is not merely an aesthetic medium but also a way to preserve the memory of the past.

There are five types of dance. They are seldom performed on their own but instead are integrated into a programme where each is performed in turn.

Impressive and highly physical, the *otea* dance is accompanied by percussion instruments. Originally a male-only war dance, today's dancers include females, but the 'manly' character is still preserved in the body language, the rhythm and the sudden loud cries of the dancers. Volcanoes, sharks, historical events or legends, all of which may be suggested by the use of props, are the underlying themes dictating choreography.

The free-flowing and graceful *aparima* dance is a mixed-gender performance that tells a story using hand movement and song. The story may be a legend, a love song or a scene from everyday life. Guitar and ukulele provide the musical accompaniment. The dancers follow every hand movement with their eyes and faces.

In the *hivinau* dance, men and women form a double circle surrounding an orchestra (drums only) and male vocal soloist known as the *ra'atira hivinau*. The soloist recites a few words and the dancers reply with a chorus. During the chorus, the dancers in each circle turn and face a partner and dance as a couple. Performance of the *hivinau* is becoming something of a rare occurrence since it requires such a large number of participants.

The *paoa* dance features a male and female choir seated on the ground in a semicircle around a male vocal soloist who recites a few words, often based on legend. The members

of the choir respond and keep time by slapping their thighs with both hands. The orchestra (drums only) maintains a position next to the soloist. One couple then comes into the centre and improvises a dance. As in the *hivinau*, it is the dialogue between the leader and the choir that is the key element of the *paoa*.

The fire dance, which is thought to have originated in Samoa, is frequently put on as part of shows in hotels because it is so impressive. The performer, always a man, juggles a flaming torch alight at both ends, against a background of drums.

Literature

Polynesia has been getting the Western pen flowing since the first European explorers returned with accounts of paradise islands and beautiful people. But oral recitation was the first fountain pen of the Pacific, and the written word only came into being after the missionaries began producing texts in Tahitian in the 19th century. This dependence on the spoken word has meant that Polynesia's history has been re-created out of European observations, and the Polynesian experience constructed out of European suppositions. It also means that literature written by Polynesians has only recently begun to grace the bookshelves.

There are a number of interesting Polynesian writers who are slowly changing the literary landscape, but few have been translated into English. If you read French, writers such as Henri Hiro, Turo Raapoto, Hubert Bremond, Charles Manutahi, Michou Chaze, Chanter Spitz and Louise Peltzer are all interesting.

Breadfruit by Celestine Hitiura Vaite (2000), a Tahitian living in Australia, is a

RECOMMENDED LISTENING Celeste Brash

Angelo Neuffer Highly political and poetic lyrics have made Angelo one of the most popular Tahitian artists of all time. One of his best albums is *Te Nuna'a no Ananahi*.

Bobby Very listenable, almost dreamy Polynesian music. His album with Angelo, titled *Bobby and Angelo*, is one of the most listened-to albums in Tahiti.

Ester Tefana For old-fashioned, ukulele-accompanied, Tahitian mood music, Ester is your best bet.

Fenua Bringing Tahitian music into the future, this group fuses the traditional with techno for an explosive sound.

Tapuarii Laughlin Most modern classics are written by 'Tapu' who mixes surfer-cool with traditional.

Te Ava Piti This is your classic Polynesian music with plenty of fast ukulele riffs.

Trio Kikiriri Perhaps a bit cheesy to Western ears, this synths/ukulele group is an all-time favourite for weddings and parties where people dance the Tahitian foxtrot.

novel set in contemporary Tahiti. The poverty and social problems facing many Tahitians are not glossed over, and the dialogue is evocatively garnished with Tahitian and French (don't worry, a glossary is provided).

Music

Traditional Polynesian music, usually performed as an accompaniment to dance, is heard reverberating through the islands. Ukuleles and percussion instruments dominate this style of music, which is structured by a hypnotic and an often quite complex drum beat. Song, both traditional and religious, is also popular and important.

Modern Polynesian music by local artists is the blaring soundtrack to everyday life, whether it's in a bus, at a café or on the radio. Some groups also perform in hotels and bars.

Painting & Sculpture

Even today, well over a hundred years after his arrival on Tahiti, painting in the South Pacific is synonymous with Paul Gauguin, the French postimpressionist painter. Gauguin spent much of his later life in Polynesia, and presented Europe with images of the islands that moulded the way Europeans viewed (and, arguably, continue to view) Polynesia. In his wake a number of predominantly European artists – working in media ranging from watercolour to line drawing – have also sought inspiration in the region. These artists have contributed to the very characteristic painting style of the region, which is largely representational.

Matisse made a short visit to Tahiti, but his Polynesian work is eclipsed by the work of Jacques Boullaire. Boullaire, a French artist who first travelled to Tahiti in the 1930s, produced many magnificent watercolours; reproductions of his work are readily available today.

Traditionally the best sculpture and woodcarvings have come out of the Marquesas, where fine *tiki* (sacred statues), bowls, mortars and pestles, spears and clubs are carved from rosewood, *tou* wood or in stone. The best-known contemporary sculptor is the potter Peter Owen, who lives on Huahine, but the work of the appropriately named Woody on Mo'orea is also well known.

Tattoos

Since the early 1980s, tattooing has enjoyed a strong revival, becoming one of the most expressive and vibrant vehicles of Polynesian culture. With encouragement from the great Samoan masters, young Tahitians have delved into their ancient traditions and have brought this ancestral form of bodily adornment, with its undisputed artistic qualities, completely up to date. Today many Polynesian men and women sport magnificent tattoos as symbols of their identity.

Modern tattooing is completely for the sake of style or beautification; in ancient times it was a highly socially significant and sophisticated art. Firstly, it was a symbol of community or clan membership and geographic origin. Each island group had their own style of tattoo: the Tuamotu islands used simple, geometric shapes; the Marquesans' designs were the most intricate and elaborately designed and are the inspiration for contemporary tattoos. It was also an initiation rite: in the Marquesas, the onset of adulthood was marked by a ceremony during which young men would display their tattoos as symbols of bravery; women were not allowed to help with the cooking until they passed a rite of having their hands tattooed. Social status was also displayed through tattooing: as people progressed through different stages of life, they covered their bodies with more tattoos. This aesthetic adornment played a part in the seduction process as well. Finally, tattooing served to intimidate: in the Marquesas warriors tattooed their faces to make themselves look terrifying to enemies.

LANGUAGE

Tahitian and French are the official languages of French Polynesia, although Tahitian is spoken much more than it is written. Much of the tourist industry uses English, but if you venture to the more remote and less touristy islands it's useful to know some French. On all islands, at least trying a few words in French will win you friends – fortunately, bad French is readily accepted.

Tahitian, known as Maohi, is a Polynesian language very similar to Hawaiian and Cook Islands Maori. Other languages in the islands include Austral, Marquesan and Tuamotuan.

In Tahitian, a glottal stop replaces the consonants 'k' and 'ng'. The Polynesian word *vaka* (canoe) is *va'a* in Tahitian. It's important to use the glottal stop, as the break can change the meaning of the word. For example, the Tahitian word *hoe* means 'paddle' or 'row', but *ho'e* is the word for 'one'.

Tahitian basics

Hello.	<i>Ia ora na, nana.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Parahi, nana.</i>
Welcome.	<i>Maeva, manava.</i>
How are you?	<i>E aha te huru?</i>
Thanks.	<i>Maururu roa.</i>
Yes.	<i>E, 'oia.</i>
No.	<i>Aita.</i>
My name is...	<i>To'u 'oo 'o...</i>
I don't understand.	<i>Aita i ta'a ia'u.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The environmental repercussions of French nuclear testing are still hotly debated. The view that Moruroa and Fangataufa were fissured by tests and that radioactivity has escaped was confirmed in 1999 when the French government admitted for the first time that cracks existed in the atolls' coral cones.

Atolls are ecologically fragile places, but French Polynesia has been slow to do much to protect them. It's a catch-22: the islands' mainstay, tourism, depends on the idyll of an unspoiled natural environment, but increased development is tarnishing that image.

Rubbish is perhaps the most visible environmental problem. The Pacific islands don't have remote landfills to send their rubbish to, so it's not unusual to see garbage dumps spoiling the natural setting. The garbage pollutes the watercourses, which pollute the lagoons.

Geography

French Polynesia is a vast, scattered collection of 118 islands and atolls that stretch across five million square kilometres of ocean. However, most of these volcanic blips are small and the five archipelagos have a total land area of barely 3500 sq km.

The Society Islands (see the map, p590), the westernmost archipelago, have mountains and lagoons protected by barrier reefs, sometimes dotted with small fringing islets known as *motu*. Subdivided into the Wind-

ward and Leeward Islands, the Societies are home to more than three-quarters of French Polynesia's population. Polynesia's administrative capital, Pape'ete, is on Tahiti.

The Tuamotus, east of the Society Islands, are classic low-lying coral atolls. The remote Marquesas, north of the Tuamotus and not far from the equator, are rugged high islands but lack barrier reefs or lagoons. Finally, there are the even more remote and scattered Australs, also high islands, and the tiny Gambier Archipelago.

Ecology

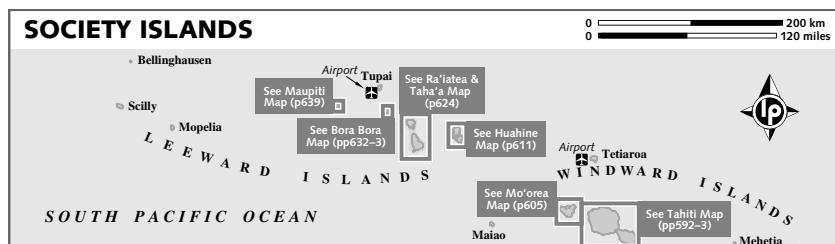
French Polynesia's flora and fauna is limited compared with that of the west Pacific. There are no snakes but plenty of insects. Mosquitoes are annoying, as are the Marquesan *nono* (sandflies). French Polynesia boasts about 100 species of *manu* (birds). On the low islands many nest on the ground or in bushes. Sea birds include terns, petrels, noddies, frigate birds, boobies and tropicbirds. It's thought that up to one million *kaveka* (sooty terns) nest on 'Ua Huka in the Marquesas, while the Tuamotus have numerous islands inhabited only by birds.

The coral reefs provide a rich environment for marine life. Sea creatures include *rori* (sea cucumber), sharks, *ono* (barracuda),

BEST EATING

Polynesians like to eat and they like it when you eat. Luckily, the food on offer is a pleasure on the palate. The following are Lonely Planet's top five restaurant choices.

- Coco's (p602) serves the finest of French cuisine with a fabulous view of Mo'orea.
- It's worth the effort to find local-style Snack Tavana (p603), which serves the tastiest snack fare anywhere.
- 'Live entertainment' from the local ray population and gourmet dining are on offer at Restaurant Te Honu Iti (p609).
- Lagon Burger (p646) is a little shack with the best salads and sashimi in French Polynesia.
- Restaurant Mauarii (p623) seduces with scrumptious traditional Tahitian food, white sand and sunsets.



manta rays, moray eels, dolphins and the endangered *honu* (turtle). In Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas, electra dolphins, also known as pygmy orcas or melon-headed whales, gather in their hundreds in a unique phenomenon; in the Australs whales are the attraction, and it's possible to swim with them.

The luxuriant flora of French Polynesia, particularly on the high islands, is recent and introduced. Ancient Polynesian navigators brought plants and fruits that flourished. In the 19th century missionaries and settlers imported other ornamental and commercial plants. Vegetation varies significantly from one archipelago to another. On the atolls, where the soil is poor and winds constant, bushy vegetation and coconut palms predominate. On the high islands, plant cover is more diverse and changes according to the altitude.

TAHITI

pop 169,624 / area 1045 sq km

You'll have to forget about stereotypical fantasies of tantalizing blue lagoons and porcelain sand beaches, and look for a different take on paradise to really get Tahiti's beauty. The problem is its name is so synonymous with the cliché that many visitors feel so duped upon arriving they head straight for more classically dreamy shores. But don't dismiss Tahiti upon first glance – the largest and most industrialised of the Polynesian islands is more than just a required arrival point, it's a destination on its own. A crazy cacophony of colour and sound, the capital, Pape'ete, oozes humidity and teems with outdoor cafés, pulsating nightlife and vibrant markets. Beyond city limits you'll discover exotic black-sand beaches, whimsical velvet-green mountains and lush valleys dripping tropical foliage.

From fabulous dance performances and swanky (and usually cheaper) luxury resorts to big-time surfing, it may take a little while to catch Tahiti's urban groove, but once you get *it* you just might find yourself in love.

ORIENTATION

The *pointe kilométrique* (PK; kilometre point) markers start at zero in Pape'ete and increase in both a clockwise and an anti-clockwise direction around Tahiti Nui (Big Tahiti) until they meet at Taravao, the town at the isthmus that connects Tahiti Nui with Tahiti Iti. The counting starts again on Tahiti

TAHITI IN...

Two Days

Spend the first day exploring colourful Pape'ete, making sure to stop and shop at the famous **Marché de Pape'ete** (p595). Have dinner at a chic French restaurant like **La Corbeille d'Eau** (p602), then catch a dance performance and cocktail at one of the posh resorts or opt for a night dancing in Pape'ete's cacophonous **bars and clubs** (p603). Head out of town on day two, and follow the road south to the smaller Tahiti Iti. Spend the night at the fantastic **Vanira Lodge** (p601), the most creative *pension* on Tahiti.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, but spend an extra day on Tahiti Iti. Try a **surf lesson** (p597) or devote some time to jungle tramping in the **interior** (p597). You can also spend an extra night on Tahiti Nui's lively west coast, perhaps treating yourself to a night at the lux **Intercontinental Resort Tahiti** (p600) – one of the swankiest resorts in the world.

Iti, where the markers only go as far as the sealed road – remarkably the easternmost coast is still not paved. Pape'ete and the surrounding suburbs dominate the north-western coast of the island.

INFORMATION

The visitor information centre, main post office, the majority of the banks and the best bookshops are all clustered in Pape'ete.

Bookshops

Pape'ete has a few good bookshops, but the range in English is limited.

La Maison de la Presse (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) Good selection of newspapers and magazines.

Librairie du Vaima (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 57 57; Vaima Centre; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) The best bookshop.

Internet Access

Pape'ete has a few places to surf the Web.

La Maison de la Presse (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; per hr 1000 CFP)

Tiki Soft C@fé (Map pp598-9; ☎ 88 93 98; Pont de l'Est; per hr 1000 CFP)

Medical Services

For police, phone ☎ 17; for an ambulance, phone ☎ 15.

Clinique Cardella (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 81 90; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey, Pape'ete; ☎ 24hr) Private clinic behind the cathedral.

Mamao Hospital (Map pp594-5; ☎ 46 62 62, 24hr emergencies 42 01 01; Av Georges Clémenceau, Pape'ete) The biggest hospital in French Polynesia, with good facilities and a range of medical specialities.

Money

There are banks (Banque Socredo, Banque de Tahiti and Banque de Polynésie) and ATMs scattered around the island. Banque Socredo and Banque de Polynésie have branches at Faa'a airport, where there's also an ATM. Most banks in Pape'ete change money and travellers cheques.

Post

Post office (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) Pape'ete's main post office is next to the Parc Bougainville.

Tourist Information

Gie Haere Mai visitor information centre

(Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 88 99; Fare Manihini Vaïete Sq; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In central

Pape'ete, this tourist office has loads of information and does bookings for small hotels and family *pensions* (guesthouses).

Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre

(Map pp598-9; ☎ 50 57 10; www.tahiti-manava.pf; Fare Manihini, Blvd Pomare; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Near Gie Haere Mai, it has information on all of French Polynesia. Although Mo'orea and Bora Bora have helpful tourist offices, the more remote islands don't, so if you have any queries, make the most of this tourist office while in Pape'ete.

TRANSPORT

All international arrivals land at Pape'ete's Faa'a International Airport, although it is possible to head almost directly to another island after your plane lands.

Getting There & Away

Pape'ete is the flight and shipping hub for all of French Polynesia.

AIR

All international flights arrive at Faa'a airport, and Air Tahiti and Air Moorea flights to the other islands leave from here. Flights within each archipelago hop from one island to the next, but many connections between archipelagos are via Faa'a.

International check-in desks are at the east end of the terminal. Air Tahiti's domestic check-in is at the west end; Air Moorea is in a separate small terminal slightly to the east of the main terminal.

For international flights to/from Tahiti, see p673; for general information about air travel within French Polynesia, see p675.

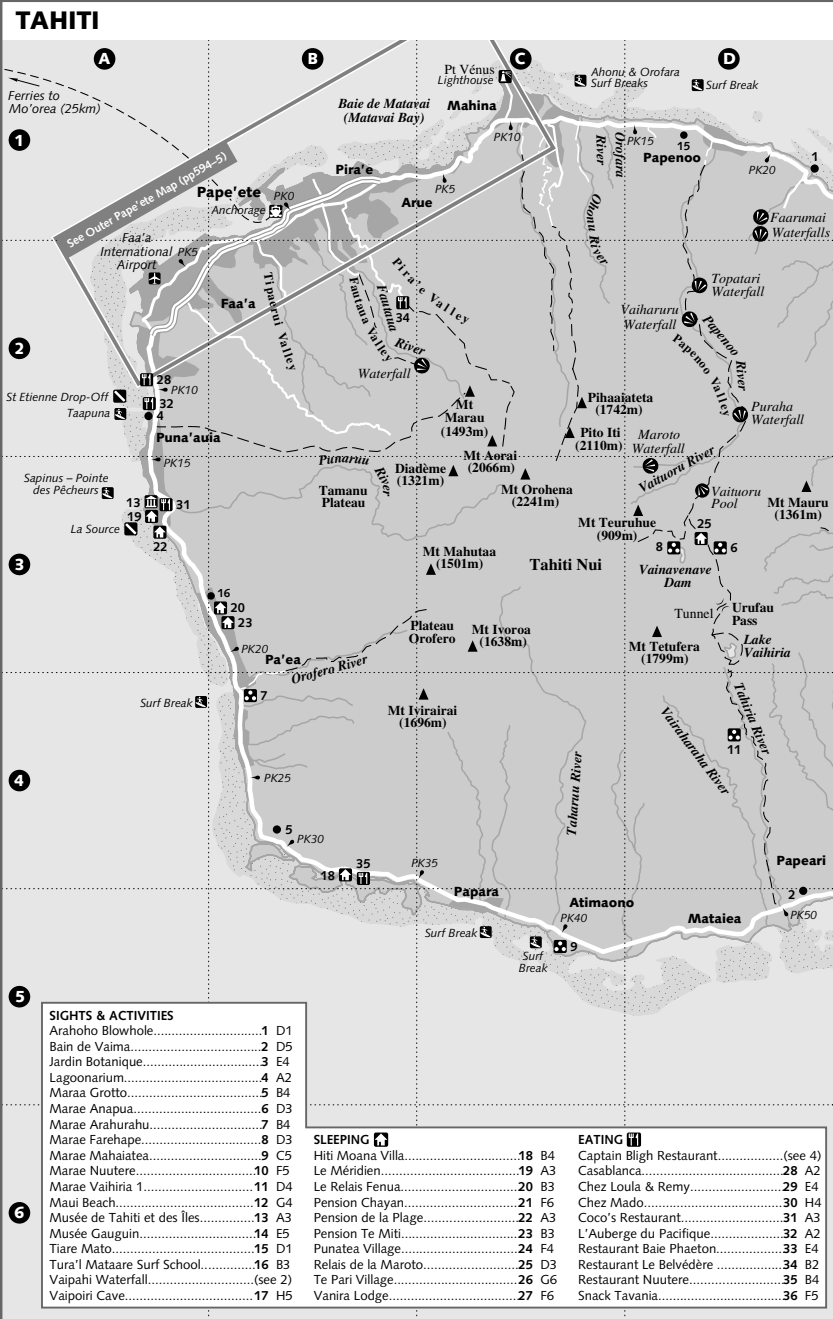
In Pape'ete, **Air Tahiti** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 86 42 42; Rue du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat) is at the intersection with Rue Edouard Ahnne.

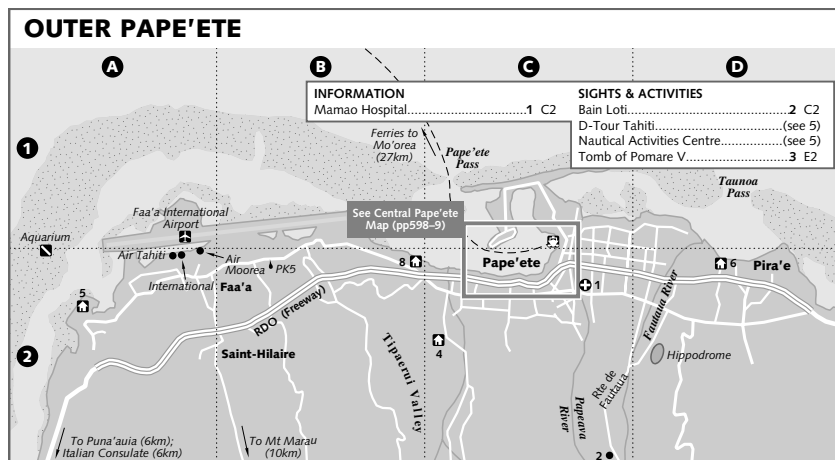
On Tahiti, **Air Moorea** (☎ 86 41 41) is based at Faa'a airport.

BOAT

All boats to other islands moor at the ferry quay at the northern end of Blvd Pomare in Pape'ete. The numerous cargo ships to the different archipelagos work from the Motu Uta port zone, to the north of the city.

See p676 for general information on inter-island ships, and the individual island sections for specific information on travel to/from those destinations.





Getting Around

Getting around Tahiti is very easy if you have a car. Outside of Pape'ete and its suburbs public transport is limited and sometimes unreliable.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis are expensive, so if your hotel offers to collect you from the airport, jump at the chance. Otherwise the short drive to central Pape'ete will set you back 2000 CFP during the day and 2500 CFP at night (8pm to 6am).

If you arrive at a reasonable time of the day, you will be able to catch any bus going towards town from the airport (northeast bound or to your left as you leave the airport), which will take you straight to the centre of Pape'ete in about 15 minutes for a flat fare of 130 CFP during the day and 250 CFP after 6pm (children cost 65 CFP; it's an extra 100 CFP for your baggage). Walk straight across the car park outside the airport, up the steps to street level and across the road to hail a city-bound *le truck* (trucks with bench seats in the back for passengers). From Pape'ete, take a bus heading to Faa'a and Outumaoro – the destination will be clearly posted on the front – from along Rue du Général de Gaulle.

BUS

On weekdays buses operate roughly every 15 minutes (though this varies) from dawn

until about 5.30pm except for the Pape'ete–Faa'a–Outumaoro line, which runs until around 10pm. The service is less frequent on weekends. Fares start from 150 CFP (65 CFP for children and students).

Tahiti's buses have their route number and the final destination clearly marked. There are official bus stops, but drivers often stop if you hail them.

CAR

Driving on Tahiti is quite straightforward and, although accident statistics are not encouraging, the traffic is fairly light once you get away from Pape'ete. Watch for children and dogs on the road.

Many of the following car-hire companies on Tahiti also have desks at the bigger hotels:

Avis Faa'a airport (☎ 85 02 84); Pape'ete (Map pp598-9;

☎ 54 10 10; cnr Rue des Remparts & Av Georges Clémenceau); Pape'ete (☎ 43 88 99; Quai des Ferries)

Daniel Rent-a-Car (☎ 82 30 04; Faa'a airport)

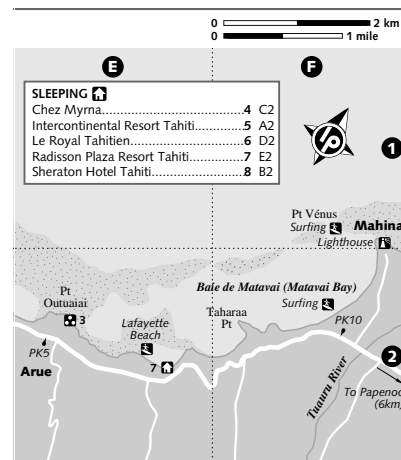
Europcar Faa'a airport (☎ 86 60 61); Pape'ete (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 24 24; cnr Av du Prince Hinoi & Rue des Remparts)

Hertz (☎ 82 55 86; Faa'a airport)

Tahiti Rent-a-Car (☎ 81 94 00; Faa'a airport)

HITCHING

Hitching on Tahiti is relatively easy and usually quite safe, and you'll see both locals and *popaa* (Europeans) standing on the tarmac with their thumbs in the air. Avoid hitching on Friday and Saturday



nights, when the roads are filled with alarmingly intoxicated drivers.

TAXI

Taxis are so expensive that most visitors choose to ignore them. All the big hotels have taxi ranks, and there are plenty of taxis in central Pape'ete.

PAPE'ETE

Dreamy beach town this is not, nor does this smouldering metropolis resemble the glittery Las Vegas image tourism boosters like to tout. No, the region's 'Big Smoke' is a sweaty, concrete jungle bursting with bright lights and grimy edges. Pape'ete quickly divides its guests – you'll either get its chaotic passion and colourful clutter or run quickly from its pushy crowds and lack of gorgeous vistas. If you can stomach it, stick around a bit. The place just might start to grow on you. That said, even the city's biggest fans probably won't need much more than a day to poke around.

Between Rue du 22 Septembre and Rue F Cardella is the deliciously appealing **Marché de Pape'ete** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 6am-6pm). Colourful, chaotic and oh-so Polynesian, it's bursting with flowers, food, tropical fruit, pâtisseries, art and souvenirs. If you're in town, you should be checking it out. The food is downstairs and the rest, upstairs.

The bustling **waterfront** is another big attraction; although beyond watching the yachts, cargo ships and inter-island ferries

toing and froing with their cargos of people and goods there's not much to see. Photographers will find the place interesting in the afternoon when fishing boats unload their glistening catch.

Bain Loti (Map pp594-5), 2.5km inland, was where the beautiful maiden Rarahu met her hero in Pierre Loti's 1880 novel *The Marriage of Loti*. The pool is no longer the same pleasantly rural scene, but it remains a favourite local meeting place and great swimming hole, and a bust of Loti overlooks the scene.

Pape'ete Walking Tour

Pape'ete doesn't have that many must-see sights, but strolling its chaotic streets, bustling waterfront area and grimy, darker alleys allows you to experience a side, and cultural aspect, of French Polynesia's largest city that you just can't score from the back seat of a car. See the map, p596.

This walking tour begins on the pleasant four-lane Blvd Pomare, shaded by overhanging trees and brightened by hibiscuses, heading in the direction of **To'ata Sq (1)**. Popular with locals on weekends, it has loads of little alfresco cafés. During the Heiva, this is where you'll see most dance and music performances. From the square head towards the imposing pink church, **Église Évangélique de Polynésie Française (2)**. It makes for a good picture and is packed on Sunday mornings. On the inland side of the road is the **Parc Bougainville (3)**; Bougainville Park), which is a shady, green oasis in the city. From the park head toward Rue Jeanne d'Arc. You'll pass the slightly bland, but useful, Vaima Centre along the way – it's full of shops and airline offices. Next up is the **Cathédrale de l'Immaculée (4)**, built in 1875. It's a lovely cool spot for a quiet moment.

Following Rue du Général de Gaulle, turn left into Rue du 22 Septembre to the **Marché de Pape'ete (5; left)**. Here you can buy almost any produce that is available in French Polynesia, and wandering around is loads of fun. When you've finished shopping stroll back towards Blvd Pomare and look for the **Place Vaiete (6)** on the harbour side. It's home to multiple *roulottes* (food vans or mobile diners) and lots of free, locally produced outdoor music and dance performances and vendors selling local crafts.

CENTRAL PAPE'ETE

A	B	C	D
INFORMATION ATM.....(see 11) Australian Consulate.....(see 46) Banque de Polynésie & ATM.....1 D4 Banque de Polynésie & ATM.....2 F5 Banque de Tahiti & ATM.....3 G4 Banque Socredo & ATM.....4 G3 Banque Socredo & ATM.....(see 32) Chilean Consulate.....5 F5 Clinique Cardella.....6 G5 Dutch Consulate.....7 F1 Gie Haere Mai Visitor Information Centre.....8 F4 Gie Tahiti Manava Visitor Information Centre.....(see 8) La Maison de la Presse.....9 G3 Librairie du Vaima.....10 F4 New Zealand Consulate.....(see 46) Police aux Frontières.....(see 8) Post Office.....11 E4 Tiki Soft C@fé.....(see 24)	DRINKING ☑ Café de la Gare.....(see 16) La Cave.....26 G2 Le Paradis.....27 G2 Le Rétro.....28 F4 Les 3 Brasseurs.....29 G3 Piano Bar.....30 G3 Royal Kikiriri.....31 H3 Voo Doo Lounge Bar.....(see 25)	ENTERTAINMENT ☑ Concorde.....(see 10) Hollywood.....32 E4	SHOPPING ☑ Gallerie Winkle.....33 F4 Marché de Pape'ete.....(see 13) Olivier Creations.....34 G4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES Galerie des Tropiques.....12 A4 Marché de Pape'ete.....13 G4	TRANSPORT Air France.....35 F5 Air New Zealand.....(see 46) Air Tahiti.....36 G4 Air Tahiti Nui.....37 H4 Avis.....38 H4 Bus Stop.....39 F4 Bus Stop.....40 G4 Bus Stop.....41 G4 Corsair.....42 G2 Europcar.....43 H3 Hawaiian Airlines.....(see 10) Inter-Island Boat Quay.....44 G2 LAN.....(see 10) Mo'orea Ferry Quay.....45 G2 Qantas.....46 F4 Taxi Stand.....47 F4 Taxi Stand.....48 G2 Taxi Stand.....49 G4	SLEEPING ☑ Kon Tiki Pacific.....14 G2 Teamo Pension.....15 H5	EATING ☑ Café de la Gare.....16 E4 La Corbeille d'Eau.....17 B4 Le Dragon d'Or.....18 G4 Le Manava Restaurant.....19 D4 Lou Pescadou.....20 F5 L'Ap'izzeria.....21 C4 L'O à la Bouche.....22 F5 Morrison's Café.....23 F4 Tiki Soft C@fé.....24 H4 Voo Doo Lounge Bar.....25 G3

in Pae'a. The school offers 10 half-day lessons for 27,000 CFP, and single full day lessons for 4500 CFP. The courses are run by a qualified instructor, and they include equipment, transportation to the different surfing spots and insurance. The hours for the different types of lessons vary.

The monster wave at **Hava'e pass** – also known as Teahupoo – instills fear even in the most seasoned surfers. **Te Ava Iiti** and **Vairao** passes are less intense, but get dangerous and are recommended for experienced surfers only. To brush up on your surfing skills or try a first lesson, contact **Ecole de Surf Iiti Nui** (☎ 73 14 21; half-day lesson 3500 CFP).



Swimming

On Tahiti Iti, **Maui Beach** (Map pp592-3; PK8) is a picturesque strip of inviting white sand offering shallow swimming that's perfect for children, as well as deeper swimming and snorkelling off the reef. The black-sand beaches located at PK18 in Teahupoo and PK6 in Pueu are good for body board-

ing, but note that they can be rough for swimming.

Water Sports

At the Intercontinental, the **Nautical Activities Centre** (Map pp594-5; ☎ 53 34 96; www.aquatic-dive.com) has a long menu of watery activities.

TAHITI FOR CHILDREN

Any kid that loves the beach will love French Polynesia, and Polynesians absolutely love children. In Pape'ete, there are special child-oriented cultural and artistic shows in Parc Bougainville, along with a big playground.

Jardin Botanique (Map pp592-3; admission 500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm) Kids will dig the huge Galapagos tortoises at these 137-hectare gardens, on the far south coast of Tahiti Nui.

Lagoonarium (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 62 90; PK11; adult/child 500/300 CFP; ☎ 9am-6pm) Within Pape'ete's urban sprawl, this is a pleasant tourist trap popular with the little ones. A meshed-in area of lagoon with a very modest underwater viewing room is reached through a giant concrete shark's mouth, and you can watch the small sharks and other creatures.

Maui Beach (Map pp592-3; PK8) On Tahiti Iti, this is a picturesque strip of white sand with shallow swimming that's perfect for children.

TOURS

It seems that almost every hotel and travel agency offers an island-circuit tour by minibus. You'll pay around 7500 CFP for a full day and around 5000 CFP for a half-day. In the high season it's wise to book several days in advance. Try the following:

Natura Exploration (☎ 43 03 83)

Patrick Adventure (☎ 83 29 29)

Tahiti Safari Expedition (☎ 42 14 15)

SLEEPING

The best places to stay on Tahiti are outside Pape'ete. The west coast of Tahiti Nui has the greatest concentration of sleeping options, while Tahiti Iti has some fabulous *pensions*. Be sure to make reservations during the Heiva festivities in July, when many hotels are booked out.

Pape'ete

There's a cluster of midrange places to stay right in the heart of Pape'ete, while most of the top-end and budget places tend to be on the edges of town.

Le Royal Tahitien (Map pp594-5; ☎ 50 40 40; www.hotelroyaltahitien.com; r 17,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) A private black-sand beach, stylish digs and a waterfront restaurant enhance the appeal at this charming, excellent-value hotel. Local musicians perform on Friday and Saturday evenings. Le Royal Tahitien is about 3km east of Pape'ete in Pira'e.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (Map pp594-5; ☎ 86 51 10; www.tahiti.interconti.com; r/over-water bungalows from 40,000/55,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) The Intercontinental is as posh as the island of Tahiti gets. Rooms are fabulous, kitted out with marble bathrooms, plush canopies and Mo'orea views from private balconies. The two swimming pools are also standout (one features a slick, cascading horizon), the restaurant has a great reputation and the water-sports centre is the best on the island. On the downside, the beach is artificial (made from heaps of imported white sand) and the lagoon not nearly as dreamy as those on other islands. The resort is on the outskirts of Pape'ete, just west of the airport on the beach.

Chez Myrna (Map pp594-5; ☎ 42 64 11; dammeyer.family@mail.pf; r incl breakfast 7000 CFP) This friendly place does airport transfers for 1000 CFP any time of day or night, making it a good option if you have an early plane to catch. It's also the best budget bet around town, with two sparkling rooms. Chez Myrna is on the outskirts of Pape'ete, a little east of Faa'a airport.

Radisson Plaza Resort Tahiti (Map pp594-5; ☎ 48 88 39; www.radisson.com/arufrp; r from 18,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) It's brash looking from the outside, but tasteful and artistic within. Rooms are spacious and modern; the open-air bar, black-sand beach and on-site activities centre provide reasons to stay. The Radisson is east of Pape'ete.

Sheraton Hotel Tahiti (Map pp594-5; ☎ 86 48 48; www.starwoodtahiti.com; r from 33,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) Despite its complete lack of beach, the Sheraton is a lovely place for a short stay. The lagoonside pool is fantastic, the hot tub (placed creatively on top a pile of rocks) has awesome Mo'orea views and there's an over-water restaurant and bar.

Kon Tiki Pacific (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 16 16; kontiki@mail.pf; 271 Blvd Pomare; r from 12,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) The Kon Tiki Pacific is a bit of a party place appealing to the boozing backpacker crowd more interested in partaking in the nightlife than sleeping. The bar gets rowdy at happy hour while the on-site nightclub keeps things buzzing late. The 20 sea-facing rooms have fantastic views, but the noise is

less than appealing. The hotel is in central Pape'ete.

Teamo Pension (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 00 35; Rue du Pont-Neuf; dm/d 2500/5000 CFP) Far from flash, this is the cheapest place to stay in central Pape'ete. Hot water is only available from 6pm to 9pm. The shared kitchen is a plus. Only consider it if you're on a serious budget or other places are full.

Around Tahiti Nui

There are a number of places to stay along the west coast, particularly around Puna'auia.

Hiti Moana Villa (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 93 93; hiti.moanavilla@mail.pf; PK32; bungalows from 9000 CFP; ☎) Impeccably clean bungalows set around a well-tended garden make this lagoonside spot in Papara a great option. There is no beach, but you can swim from the pontoon. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP.

Relais de la Maroto (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 90 29; maroto@mail.pf; r 7000 CFP, bungalows from 9500 CFP) In a lovely location smack in the lush heart of the island, this place is popular with hikers. The wine cellar at the on-site restaurant is exceptional, the French cuisine quite tasty. Book ahead.

Le Méridien (Map pp592-3; ☎ 47 07 07; www.lemeridien.com; r from 40,000 CFP, over-water bungalows 56,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) Rivalling the Intercontinental in the luxury department, Le Méridien's over-water bungalows are ultra-spacious and exquisitely outfitted. Look for the resort in Puna'auia.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Vanira Lodge (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 70 18; www.vaniralodge.com; Teahupoo; bungalows 14,000 CFP; ☎) Perched high on a hillside with fabulous lagoon views, this unique place is our favourite *pension* on Tahiti. The four bungalows are eclectic (although not really designed with security in mind – nothing locks or shuts) and blend perfectly into the environment. Each is different, but all are architecturally stimulating and made from some combination of bamboo, thatch, reed, stained glass, adobe, coral and rock. Cosy nooks, hand-carved furniture, airy mezzanines and alfresco kitchens are unique touches. When we stopped by the owners were constructing an open-air bar and swimming pool. Meals can be arranged.

Pension Te Miti (Map pp592-3; ☎ 58 48 61; www.pensiontemiti.com; PK18.6; dm 2500 CFP, r from 6500 CFP; ☎ ☎) Young backpackers dig this friendly, low-key place, which can have tons of atmosphere when it's crowded. Pluses include 24-hour airport transfers (1500 CFP per person), easy access to a white-sand beach and a well-equipped communal kitchen.

Le Relais Fenua (Map pp592-3; ☎ 45 01 98; www.relais-fenua.pf; PK18.25; r from 9000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) A great option in Pa'ea, the clean, spacious rooms are stumbling distance from the lagoon and there's a snack place just around the corner. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP; children under 12 can stay for free.

Pension de la Plage (Map pp592-3; ☎ 45 56 12; www.pensiondelaplage.com; PK15.4; r from 8000 CFP; ☎) The giant windows in the comfortable-sized rooms and the easy access to Puna'auia's white-sand beach were just two of the reasons why we liked this place. It's also impeccably maintained. Meals can be arranged.

Tahiti Iti

Tahiti Iti has a few great choices.

Te Pari Village (Map pp592-3; ☎ /fax 42 59 12; bungalows with full board per person 9500 CFP) This place is pretty damn good value considering rates include meals and excursions. It's a perfect choice for couples looking to escape – it can only be reached by boat. The atmosphere is quiet, the location, in the middle of a magnificent coconut grove beside the lagoon, fabulous.

Pension Chayan (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 46 00; www.pensionchayan.pf; PK14 Vairao; r from 15,000 CFP) Locals recommend this place to friends, raving about the peaceful atmosphere, sparkling bungalows and magnificent tropical garden. A small black-sand swimming beach across the road is another plus.

Punatea Village (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 71 00; www.punatea.com; PK4.7; d 5500 CFP, bungalows 9000 CFP) The bungalows and small rooms overlook a rocky beach. Shaitsu massage and an infrared sauna are the real reasons to stay. Half board adds another 3000 CFP per person.

EATING

Pape'ete's restaurants span cuisines from around the globe. Most places are closed on Sunday. Outside Pape'ete options are limited, although a few exceptional restaurants are found around the island.

Pape'ete

L'O à la Bouche (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 29 76; Passage Cardella; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) At this, one of the best restaurants in this town, the owner clearly revels in his customers' gastronomic delight. The beautifully presented French appetisers and mains are as fabulous as the desserts. There's always one veggie option.

Le Manava Restaurant (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 02 91; Av Bruat; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This extremely French place is painted a slick, bright turquoise and oozes a 1970s party vibe. It's very trendy, and the food comes highly recommended.

Café de la Gare (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Chic, smoky and always packed, this heavenly place has the feel of a true Parisian bistro. The menu is loaded with grilled meats and salads. At night the tables are cleared away, and DJs spin House for a trendy, young crowd.

Lou Pescadou (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 74 26; Rue Anne-Marie Javouhey; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A Pape'ete institution, this cheery Italian restaurant's hearty pizza and pasta dishes taste as delicious as they smell. Service is superfast and there are lots of veggie options – a rarity in this part of the world.

Morrison's Café (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 78 61; Vaima Centre; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A funky-kitsch place that takes its name from Jim (not Van), which is abundantly clear as soon as you step inside. It's cheesy, but popular, with rooftop seating and a French and Tahitian menu. There's live music some nights.

L'Apizzeria (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 98 30; Blvd Pomare; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This denlike haven is always pretty packed and locals say the service is good. The ambience is

rough-hewn cosy; the menu features lots of pasta and salad.

Le Dragon d'Or (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 96 12; Rue Colette; dishes 1000-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) A classic Chinese restaurant, it offers a quiet escape from Pape'ete's sweaty bustle and has a reputation for good food.

Tiki Soft Café (Map pp598-9; ☎ 88 93 98; Pont de l'Est; dishes 500-1500 CFP; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A hip spot for a quick coffee or snack during the day, it's also a gathering place for the city's gay and lesbian community – especially at night when the bar gets rocking.

La Corbeille d'Eau (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 77 14; Blvd Pomare; dishes 2500-5000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Locals rave about this intimate country-style French restaurant with modern-art adorned walls and crisp white tablecloths. It's a bit out of the way, but a good choice for a romantic meal.

Voo Doo Lounge Bar (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert; dishes from 1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Drink or dine on faux leopard print at this stylish, intimate and very cool joint. The progressive French-Pacific rim fusion menu is fabulous and worth the price.

Restaurant Le Belvédère (Map pp592-3; ☎ 42 73 44; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The views over Pape'ete are fantastic, particularly at sunset. Fondues are the speciality, and quite delicious, at this fine-dining restaurant perched 600m above the city in Pira'e. Le Belvédère provides free transport from some hotels in Pape'ete at 11.45am, 4.30pm and 7pm. If you drive, take the first right after the Hamuta Total fuel station.

Around Tahiti Nui

Lots of little stalls are set up along the road around Tahiti Nui, and restaurants dot the coastal road, particularly around Taravao.

L'Auberge du Pacifique (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 98 30; PK11.2; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) We love how the roof of the main dining room retracts at this Tahiti institution. As cheesy as it sounds, it's heavenly romantic. Plus the food is as good as the ambience; you get to feast on innovative French dishes and fine wine. Reservations recommended.

Chez Loula & Remy (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 74 99; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Stop by this family-run place in Taravao, one of Tahiti's better French restaurants, for an

array of delicious grilled meats and fish. The atmosphere is congenial too.

Restaurant Nuutere (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 41 15; PK32.5; dishes 2000-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) French specialities, cooked with local ingredients, are served in an intimate dining room at this great little restaurant in Papara. The wine list is a sight to behold.

Restaurant Baie Phaeton (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 08 96; Taravao; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Grab a terrace table at this delightful little place serving French and Tahitian food. The restaurant turns into a lively bar and dance club around 10pm on Friday and Saturday nights.

Captain Bligh Restaurant (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 62 90; PK11.4; appetisers 1300-2000 CFP, mains 2000-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This family-oriented place at the Lagoonarium is perfect if you're travelling with young ones – there's plenty of space to run around. Adults might find it a bit cheesy, but the Friday- and Saturday-evening dance performances are well worth attending; they're put on by O Tahiti E, one of the island's best dance groups.

Casablanca (Map pp592-3; ☎ 43 91 35; PK9; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Come to this unpretentious local favourite on a Friday or Saturday night, when live music rocks the place and the vibe is rowdy. Otherwise it's a pleasant place to sit outside and dine on fine French food.

Tahiti Iti

Snack Tavana (Map pp592-3; ☎ 67 72 35; PK9.8; dishes 800-1200 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) The best snack place on Tahiti, the very popular Snack Tavana across from the Vairao mayor's office dishes up hearty portions of Tahitian, French and Chinese food that never fail to satisfy.

Chez Mado (Map pp592-3; ☎ 57 32 77; PK18 Tautira; dishes 800 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Home-made crab fritters, hot, greasy French fries and hangover-curing chow mein are served to you right on the beach at this open-air, impromptu joint. It's about as relaxed as you can get, and the food isn't bad either.

DRINKING

After a stay on other islands where nightlife is nonexistent, Pape'ete could almost pass for wild, although actually it only gets busy on weekends. Away from Pape'ete, however, nightlife is pretty nonexistent.

Bars & Pubs

Many of the places along Blvd Pomare, the noisy nightlife strip, look pretty seedy, but they are frequented by local women and families, and are generally safe for single female travellers. The snazzy top-end hotels, such as the Sheraton Hotel Tahiti (p600) and the Intercontinental Resort Tahiti (p600), all have bars where you can enjoy the ocean breezes and nibble the free peanuts; 'unchaperoned' women are much less likely to be under the spotlight in these bars.

Café de la Gare (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 75 95; Rue du Général de Gaulle) Terribly chic, terribly French, terribly smoky – it's an intimate spot for a classy cocktail. After dinner, DJs spin House for the young and trendy crowd well into the night.

Le Rétro (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 86 83; Blvd Pomare) Full of attitude and atmosphere, this is a good spot to booze it up with new friends or spend a quiet hour people watching – it has a fabulously central location. Skip the food; it's overpriced and only so-so.

Les 3 Brasseurs (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare) This place feels just like the cosy pubs back home. Down a few pints of its excellent microbrewed beer and you'll be kicking the homesick blues in no time. Cover bands perform on weekends.

Voo Doo Lounge Bar (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 08 48; Rue du Commandant Jean Gilbert) With a great low-key music scene and much more style than most Pape'ete watering holes, we like stopping at this sophisticated spot for a quiet bottle of fine French wine.

Clubs

Boulevard Pomare is the main drag for nightclubs and discos. Some establishments open only on the weekend, when you will need your elbows to force an entrance

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Coco's Restaurant (Map pp592-3; ☎ 58 21 08; PK13; dishes 2000-4500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the best choices on the island, this fabulous and romantic place offers the chance to dine in a tropical garden framed by coconut trees to a soundtrack of crashing waves. The menu is French, with lots of seafood options. Food is well presented, although service can be a bit slow.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Cave (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; admission men 2000 CFP; ☎ Fri & Sat) Head here if you're looking for a more *kaina* (local) atmosphere. The attraction is the music: the Royal Band has a local repertoire including the Tahitian waltz, zouk and foxtro. It really gets going after midnight. The entry price includes a drink.

(although women tend to be more than welcome). They typically close around 3am or 4am.

Le Paradis (Map pp598-9; Blvd Pomare; admission men 2000 CFP; ☎ Fri & Sat) A classic Pape'ete bar, it attracts a mixed crowd of Polynesians and French and is everybody's favourite stand-by discotheque.

Royal Kikiriri (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 58 64; Rue Colette; admission Fri & Sat 1500 CFP) A local favourite for Tahitian bands; the inside is nothing special but the place showcases live music every night. The admission fee includes a drink on the weekend; entry is free other nights.

Piano Bar (Map pp598-9; Rue de Écoles; admission Fri & Sat 2000 CFP) The clientele range from love-lorn sailors to passing tourists – the whole world seems to come and go from here. The music (techno, dance, local) isn't as important as the general atmosphere. There's a drag show on Friday and Saturday nights around 1am.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

Pape'ete has a few small cinemas. Admission costs 950 CFP.

Concorde (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 63 60; Vaima Centre, Rue du Général de Gaulle)

Hollywood (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 65 79; Fare Tony, Rue Largarde)

Dance Performances

Superb, colourful Polynesian dance performances are held several times a week in the big hotels. Brush aside images of cheesy tourist performances; these groups are professional and are enjoyed every bit as much by locals as by wide-eyed visitors. The 45-minute performances generally start at about 8pm. They are often accompanied by a sumptuous buffet (around 7500 CFP), although a drink at the bar will sometimes get you in.

SHOPPING

You practically trip over Pape'ete's jewellery shops and pearl specialists. If you want to shop around, there are also numerous pearl shops and pearl farms on the outer islands.

As well as pearls, pearls and more pearls, you can buy handicrafts from all over French Polynesia here: Marquesan woodcarvings,

hats and baskets woven in the Australs, and colourful *pareu* (sarong-type garments).

Marché de Pape'ete (Map pp598-9; ☎ 6am-6pm)

For reasonably priced gifts start at the market, where you'll find wooden salad servers, bright fabric, the wonderful *monoi* oil (coconut oil refined with the fragrance of tropical flowers), jewellery and even mother-of-pearl love-heart key rings!

Several art galleries show the work of Polynesian artists including:

Galerie des Tropiques (Map pp598-9; ☎ 41 05 00; cnr Blvd Pomare & Rue Cook)

Gallerie Winkle (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 81 77; Rue Jeanne d'Arc)

Olivier Creations (Map pp598-9; ☎ 48 29 36; Rue Paul Gauguin)

MO'OREA

pop 14,230 / area 53 sq km

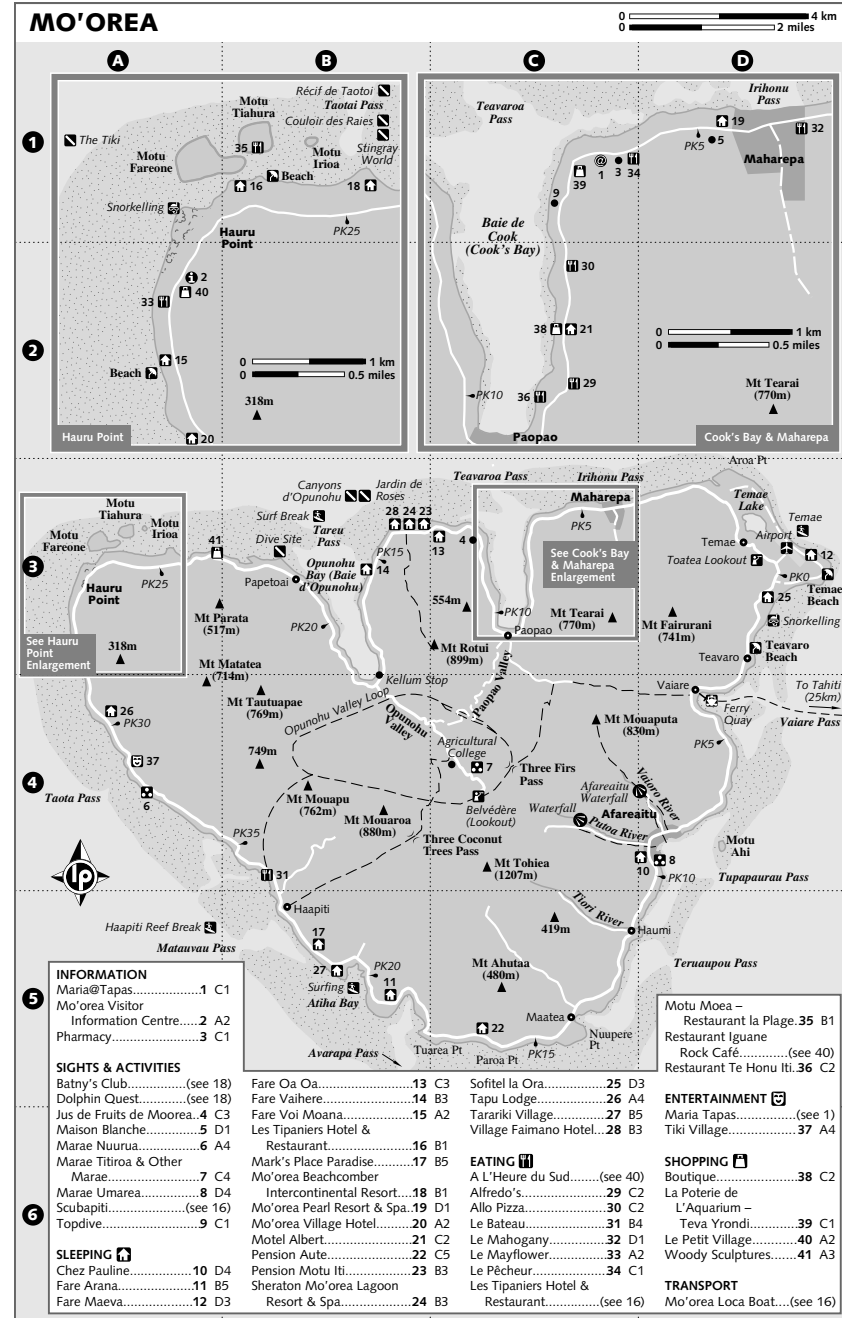
With mountains leaping almost vertically out of the clear lagoon, lush vegetation, restaurants dripping fresh fish, stylish accommodation and a languid pace of life, it's little wonder many visitors experience a sense of déjà vu upon arriving on Mo'orea – this is the island paradise you've been dreaming about all winter. Transport from Tahiti is absurdly easy, so you've no excuse but to spend, at the very least, a day or two on this veritable gem. If idling away the days ceases to do it for you, there are challenging walks, scuba diving, snorkelling, and interesting *marae* to keep you entertained.

ORIENTATION

A road runs around the coast and two roads run into the interior; they meet and climb to the *belvédère* (lookout). Most people live in coastal villages; with its frenetic quay, Vaïare is the busiest centre, but Afareaitu is the administrative centre. Tourist development is concentrated in two strips: from Maharepa down the east side of Cook's Bay (Baie de Cook) to Paopao, and around Hauru Point on the northwest corner of the island. The airport is at the northeast corner.

Beaches are rare; good ones are at Hauru Point and at Temae, near the airport.

The *pointe kilométrique* markers start at zero at the airport and meet at Haipiti,



which is at PK24 in a clockwise direction and PK35 anticlockwise.

INFORMATION

Banque Socredo, Banque de Tahiti and Banque de Polynésie have ATMs and are clustered around the small shopping centre at Maharepa at PK6.3. The rates are generally not as good here as on Tahiti.

In medical emergencies your hotel should be your first port of call.

Banque Socredo Across from the quay at Vaïare; has an ATM.

Maria@Tapas (☎ 55 01 70; PK5; per hr 1000 CFP)

Internet access in the Centre Kikipa, Cook's Bay.

Mo'orea Hospital (☎ 56 23 23; Afareaitu)

Mo'orea visitor information centre (☎ 56 29 09; Hauru Point) This office is at Le Petit Village shopping centre.

Pharmacy (☎ 56 10 51; PK6.5, Maharepa; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 3.30-6pm Sat, 8am-11am Sun) There's another pharmacy shortly after Tiki Village at PK31.

Post offices At Maharepa and Papetoai (east of Hauru Point).

Restaurant Iguane Rock Café (☎ 56 17 16; Le Petit Village, Hauru Point; per hr 1000 CFP ☎ 10am-midnight) Internet access.

TRANSPORT

Crossing the 20km separating Mo'orea from Tahiti is dead easy. It takes less than 10 minutes by plane, or half an hour by high-speed ferry. Once you arrive, there are plenty of places to pick up a car or scooter.

Getting There & Away

Air Moorea (Tahiti ☎ 86 41 41, Mo'orea 56 10 34) flies from Faa'a airport on Tahiti to Mo'orea (from 2600 CFP) at least every half-hour. There's no need to book, just turn up. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 86 42 42) also flies to Mo'orea, but chiefly for passengers connecting to other islands in the Society group. There's usually only one to three flights a day from Bora Bora (from 18,000 CFP), Huahine (from 13,000 CFP) and Raiatea (from 13,000 CFP).

The **Aremiti 5** (Pape'ete ☎ 42 88 88, Mo'orea 56 31 10) and the **Moorea Express** (Pape'ete ☎ 82 47 47, Mo'orea 56 43 43) jet between Tahiti and Mo'orea six or more times daily between 6am and 4.30pm. The trip takes about 30 minutes; fares are 900 CFP. You can buy tickets at the ticket counter on the quay just a few minutes before departure.

Getting Around

It's best to rent a scooter, car or bicycle to get around Mo'orea: distances are long and there is no public transport. Hitching is another option. It's generally very safe and if you have a little patience you'll likely get picked up.

Air Moorea offers a 500 CFP minibus service to any of the island's hotels after each flight. Most hotels, even budget places, offer airport transfers. Mo'orea **taxis** (☎ 56 10 18) are horribly expensive: from the airport to the Beachcomber Intercontinental, at the very start of Hauru Point, will cost approximately 3500 CFP.

A shuttle bus meets some of the boat arrivals (200 CFP) and runs to or from any of the Cook's Bay or Hauru Point hotels.

Car-hire operators can be found at the Vaïare boat quay, the airport, some of the major hotels and around Cook's Bay and Hauru Point. The main operators include **Europcar** (☎ 56 34 00), which also rents scooters; **Avis** (☎ 56 32 61); and **Albert Transport & Activities** (☎ 56 19 28), which generally has the lowest prices. You'll pay from around 8000 CFP per day including insurance and unlimited mileage.

Mo'orea Loca Boat (☎ 78 13 39; 2/8hr hire 7000/1100 CFP), at Les Tipaniers Hotel, rents boats, an ideal way to explore the lagoon.

COASTAL ROAD

The early-20th-century **Maison Blanche** (PK5) is a fine example of a *fare vanira* (vanilla house), a plantation house from Mo'orea's vanilla-boom era.

Spectacular **Cook's Bay**, with Mt Rotui (899m) as a backdrop, is a lovely stretch of water and one of Mo'orea's two tourist strips. The road passes **Galerie van der Heyde**, which has a collection of Oceanic art. At the base of Cook's Bay the village of **Paopao** has an interesting mural in its former fish market.

Jus de Fruits de Mo'orea (Fruit Juices of Mo'orea; ☎ 56 11 33; PK11; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) is a perfect thirst-quenching stop. The various fruit liqueurs are delicious, but a bottle of 100% pineapple juice (320 CFP) is the perfect tonic.

Opunohu Bay (Baie d'Opunohu) still feels wonderfully fresh and isolated. Almost at the top of the bay, **Kellum Stop** (☎ 56 18 52; PK17.5; garden tours 500 CFP) was the home of

the wealthy Medford Kellum. In 1925 he brought six scientists to the region and kick-started some of the pioneering Polynesian archaeological studies; call ahead for tours. At the northwest corner of the island is **Hauru Point**, Mo'orea's other main tourist strip. It has a 5km sandy **beach**, one of Mo'orea's best; you have to walk through the grounds of a hotel to reach it.

The evocative **Marae Nuurua**, on the water's edge at the end of a football field, marks the start of the less developed side of Mo'orea. **Haapiti** and **Atiha Bay** are popular with surfers.

Marae Umarea, about 100m south of Chez Pauline in Afareaitu, is worth exploring. This long wall of coral boulders along the waterfront is thought to date from about 900 AD and is Mo'orea's oldest. Afareaitu's two **waterfalls** are a major attraction.

Vaïare has a bustling port and is the start of the walk across the ridge to Paopao and Cook's Bay. Nearby, the best beaches on the east coast stretch from Teavaro to the airport. **Teavaro Beach** has good snorkelling.

The island road climbs away from the coast to the **Toatea Lookout**, which has great Tahiti views. A road on the lagoon side of the runway extends around **Temae Lake**, one of the few breeding grounds for the only species of duck found in French Polynesia.

PAOPAO & OPUNOHU VALLEYS

In the pre-European era the Opunohu Valley was dotted with *marae* – the largest number in French Polynesia – some of which have been restored and maintained. The oldest structures date from the 13th century. From the car park beside the huge **Marae Titiroa** a walking track leads through dense forest to **Marae Ahu-o-Mahine**, with an imposing three-stepped *ahu* (altar). A short way up the road from Maraé Titiroa is **Marae Afareaito** and an adjacent **archery platform**.

Beyond Maraé Afareaito the road continues to climb steeply, winding up to the excellent **belvédère** on the slopes of Mt Tohiea (1207m).

ACTIVITIES

Your guesthouse can suggest a lagoon tour operator; a six-hour tour visiting the two bays, feeding the sharks, swimming with the rays and having a *motu* picnic costs around 6000 CFP.

Cycling

This is a great way to see Mo'orea's sights. Doing the 60km circuit in a day is possible (depending on the state of those thighs), although tiring, particularly given the rather sorry state of the bikes available. Many of the hotels rent bikes for around 2000 CFP per day.

Diving & Snorkelling

You'll probably spend as much time in the water as out of it on Mo'orea. For the best snorkelling join a lagoon tour or head to Hauru Point.

For diving, contact **Bathy's Club** (☎ 56 31 44), in the Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort; **Mo'orea Fun Dive** (☎ 56 40 38; www.moorea-fundive.com; PK26.7), at the Mo'orea Beach Club; **Scubapiti** (☎ 56 20 38; www.scubapiti.com), the one centre that doesn't believe in fish feeding, at Les Tipaniers; and **Topdive – MUST** (☎ 56 17 32), on Cook's Bay. See p71 for further details about diving in French Polynesia.

Dolphin-Watching

Dolphin Quest (☎ 55 19 48; adult/child 17,000/10,000 CFP) allows kids (and adults) to get up close and personal with captive dolphins in an enclosure at the Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort.

Hiking

Good hikes include the two-hour stretch from the ferry quay at Vaïare, over the crater ridge into the central valley, emerging at Cook's Bay. The climb from near the agricultural school in the Opunohu Valley to Three Coconut Trees Pass is spectacular but the trail can be hard to follow – consider a guide. **Tiare Mato** (☎ 43 92 76), **Polynesian Adventure** (☎ 43 25 95) and Derek Grell of **Chez Tefaraahi Safari Tours** (☎ 56 41 24) organise guided walks and climbs.

Horse Riding

Ranch Opunohu Valley (☎ 56 28 55; trips 5000 CFP; ☎ closed Mon) offers two-hour guided horse rides into the island's interior. Call to arrange a trip.

Quad Biking

All-terrain-vehicle tours are the new rage on Mo'orea. These 4WD buggies built for two are a fun way to see some rugged interior

areas. Two-hour tours are available from **ATV Mo'orea Tour** (☎ 56 16 60; 14,000 CFP) and **Mahana ATV Tours** (☎ 55 10 19; 14,500 CFP).

SLEEPING

Most accommodation is concentrated on the east side of Cook's Bay and around Hauru Point. Mo'orea has superb over-water bungalows, but it also has the best selection (by local standards!) of budget *pensions* in French Polynesia.

Cook's Bay

This magnificent bay doesn't have a beach but is quieter than Hauru Point.

Mo'orea Pearl Resort & Spa (☎ 50 84 52; r/ bungalows from 27,000/37,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) We loved the infinity pool and the atmospheric bar and restaurant at this intimate luxury resort. The small white-sand beach and artistic bungalows are added perks. Choose from beach, garden or over-water bungalows.

Motel Albert (☎ 56 12 76; fax 56 58 58; units from 6500 CFP) A great-value option in a hilly setting with fabulous views. The minihouses are more than spacious with full kitchen facilities, covered porches and giant windows. If you're preparing your own food, there are several places to shop nearby and free grapefruit on offer in season.

Cook's Bay to Hauru Point

Fare Oa Oa (☎ 56 25 17; www.fareoaoa.com; dm/s/d 2500/3500/4500 CFP) There's not much privacy, but this charming place has as much character and style as you could hope for. There are four rooms that share a clean bathroom (with hot water) and lovely kitchen.

Sheraton Mo'orea Lagoon Resort & Spa (☎ 86 48 49; bungalows from 42,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) The resort is on one of the few bits of beach along this strip. Digs are exceptionally luxurious and filled with extra details such as claw-footed baths. The over-water bungalows feature glass panels in the floor for private fish viewing.

Fare Vaihere (☎ 56 19 19; www.farevaihere.com; bungalows from 15,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) This new place offers small but tastefully decorated bungalows in an open garden facing the sea. There is a communal kitchen, free kayaks, snorkelling equipment and bikes.

Village Faimano Hotel (☎ 56 10 20; www.faimano.village.com; bungalows from 10,000 CFP) Old dartboards and woodcarvings hang haphazardly

about at this place with a hippy-eclectic vibe. It's quiet, on a lovely beach and the owners will be more than happy to leave you alone.

Pension Motu Iti (☎ 55 05 20; www.pensionmotu.it.com; dm 1700 CFP, bungalows from 11,000 CFP; ☎) Mo'orea's airiest and most pleasant dorms and great-value rooms. The beach-facing ones are worth the extra cash – they have both sunrise and sunset views!

Hauru Point

Unlike Cook's Bay, Hauru Point has a very pleasant beach.

Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant (☎ 56 12 67; tipaniersresa@mail.pf; bungalows from 9000 CFP) Comfortable, easy ambience and a great beach make this an excellent choice for couples and families. The bungalows are extremely clean and spacious, just about any activity can be organised and the restaurant is one of Mo'orea's best (see p610).

Hotel Fare Voi Moana (☎ 56 17 14; garden/beach bungalows 14,000/18,000 CFP) This fair-value option on the beach has 13 very comfortable bungalows with refrigerator, mezzanine and bathroom with hot water; each accommodates up to four people. The restaurant overlooks the water and has a good reputation.

Mo'orea Village Hotel (☎ 56 10 02; fax 56 22 11; bungalows from 12,000 CFP; ☎) This place was switching ownership at the time of writing and could go through big changes before re-opening in late 2006. The site is superb, with a white beach and a little *motu* in front. You'll find a tennis court, swimming pool, bar and restaurant.

Tapu Lodge (☎ 55 20 55; www.tapulodge.com; houses from 25,000 CFP) In a quiet locale, these modern, immaculate, enormous units with ocean views are a great deal. The welcoming management offer free trips out to the *motu*.

Mo'orea Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort (☎ 55 19 19; www.moorea.interconti.com; d 46,000 CFP, bungalows from 52,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) One of the most luxurious and expensive hotels on the island – an over-water bungalow will set you back about 90,000 CFP! Every activity you can imagine is offered, as well as a few you probably couldn't (such as walking along the sea bed with a weighted helmet). The spa here is the most respected in French Polynesia, the grounds amazing.

Dream Island (☎ 56 38 81; www.dream-island.com; bungalows from 35,000 CFP) A three-minute boat ride brings you to this superbly located exclusive island paradise. Three house/bungalows are built from local materials in authentic Polynesian style. All activities are offered. There is a four-night minimum.

Camping Chez Nelson (☎ 56 15 18; www.camping-nelson.pf; camping per person 1000 CFP, dm 1600 CFP, d 4500-6000 CFP, bungalows 5000 CFP) This place on a nice strip of beach is very popular with backpackers. Prices drop if you stay more than one night. Accommodation is very basic, and the welcome is sometimes rather cool.

Haapiti to Afareaitu

Mark's Place Paradise (☎ 56 43 02; www.marks-place-paradise.com; Haapiti; dm 2000 CFP, bungalows from 6000 CFP, per person camping 1100 CFP; ☎) Mo'orea's best camping option is sadly not on the beach, but the dorms and bungalows are architecturally pleasing and tastefully decorated, so everything kind of evens out. Plus, Mark, the American owner, really goes out of his way to ensure guests are offered a myriad of activities at affordable prices.

Tarariki Village (☎ 55 21 05; pensiontarariki@mail.pf; dm/d per person 2000/2500 CFP, bungalows 5500-7500 CFP) A friendly, family atmosphere and quiet, green location make this a budget favourite. Choose from miniature cabins, Spartan dorms or a thatched bungalow perched about 3m up in a tree. Its proximity to Haapiti's Matauvau Pass makes it popular with surfers.

Chez Pauline (☎ 56 11 26; d incl breakfast 6000 CFP) Opened by Pauline Teariki's mother in 1918, this was for many years the only hotel on the island. Although it most definitely lacks the comforts of a modern hotel, it has a historic charm and offers a real opportunity to sample local life. There are seven rooms, sharing two bathrooms with cold water. The restaurant specialises in Tahitian cuisine.

Fare Arana (☎ 56 44 03; www.farearana.com; d 17,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) Up on a hill, this place is quite stylish. The gardens have a Southeast Asian flavour while the two-storey rooms are comfortable, homy and French. There are magnificent views, loads of flowers and a convivial staff.

Pension Aute (☎ 56 45 19; www.pensionaute.com; bungalows 11,000-15,000 CFP) This *pension* has an amazing position on the wild southern

side of the island and a variety of spacious bungalows for three to six people. All bungalows are very well equipped (they even have washing machines and TVs).

Temae

Sofitel la Ora (☎ 55 03 55; bungalows from 25,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) Looking across to Tahiti from Temae Beach, just 2km south of Mo'orea's airport, this place sits pretty on one of the island's best beaches. It was planning to close for extensive renovations at the time of writing. All the activities you could dream of are offered.

Fare Maeva (☎ 56 18 10; faremaevamoorea@mail.pf; bungalows 7000 CFP) A charming, isolated place dominated by coconut trees and coral gravel. All the tidy, well-decorated bungalows have kitchens and the beach is about 200m away. Follow the signs to the Golden Nugget; Fare Maeva is about 150m further on.

EATING

Cook's Bay and Hauru Point are the dining epicentres. Most places close towards 9pm Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday the options can be surprisingly bleak.

Maharepa & Cook's Bay

Restaurant Te Honu Iti (☎ 56 19 84; dishes 1600-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) The terrace of this place sits over the water, and at night the water is lit up so you can watch rays and fish pottering about below you. The food is stylish and tasty.

Le Pêcheur (☎ 56 36 12; dishes 2000-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Known for its steak and seafood, here you can splurge on giant French-style shellfish platters for two people (8200 to 13,000 CFP). Wafts of salty air mingle with the great food.

Alfredo's (☎ 56 17 71; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Alfredo's is a lively little Italian restaurant that serves hearty portions of consistently good comfort food. Transport is offered from as far as the Mo'orea Pearl Resort.

Le Mahogany (☎ 56 39 73; dishes 1500-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Reliably good French and Chinese food (meat dishes are the speciality); call for a pickup from your hotel. Credit cards are accepted.

Allo Pizza (☎ 56 18 22; pizzas 1100-1500 CFP; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Just about any kind of pizza you could think of is available

at this excellent place. It will even deliver in this area.

Papetoai & Hauru Point

The strip along Hauru Point is teeming with places to eat.

Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant (☎ 56 12 67; lunch 1000-1500 CFP, dinner 980-2500 CFP; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This well-respected restaurant, at the hotel of the same name, combines French-Italian food with a Tahitian flavour. It's a movable feast, with breakfast and lunch served at the beach, while dinner is served up near the main road. Transport can be arranged.

AL'Heure du Sud (sandwiches 450-600 CFP; ☺ lunch) A great variety of stuffed sandwiches are served at this dark blue *roulotte* in front of Petit Village shopping centre.

Le Mayflower (☎ 56 53 59; dishes 1500-3500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) Next to the Hotel Hibiscus, this recommended French place is famous for its lobster ravioli.

Motu Tiahura

Motu Moea – Restaurant la Plage (☎ 74 96 96; dishes 1000-2000 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place has an idyllic setting on Motu Tiahura (also known as Motu Moea). The food is simple, fresh and reasonably priced. Take a dip once you've digested your meal – this is the life! You can get a boat over to the *motu* from Les Tipaniers Hotel Restaurant (500 CFP).

Haapiti

Le Bateau (☎ 55 05 65; dishes 1600-3800 CFP) A floating restaurant in a boat at the end of the quay, the food here is essentially French but has many local twists. There are cocktails at the bar, and transport from Hauru Point can be arranged for 500 CFP. Reservations are recommended.

DRINKING

The big hotels have bars where all are welcome to enjoy a predinner drink, and many of the restaurants listed earlier, such as Les Tipaniers and Le Bateau are good spots for a sunset tippie.

Maria@Tapas (☎ 55 01 70; ☺ 8am-11pm Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu-Sat; ☺) Order a burrito, grab a beer and enjoy the music at this funky little Tex-Mex joint. Yes, it's a little weird living it up Latin style in a Polynesian paradise but this is often the only nightlife option

on Mo'orea. Half-price happy hour beer is available Thursday and Fridays from 6pm to 7pm. Reserve well in advance on nights when there is music (entry fee 500 CFP).

ENTERTAINMENT

A couple of times a week (usually Wednesday and Saturday evening) the bigger hotels organise excellent Polynesian music and dance performances by local groups.

Tiki Village (☎ 55 02 50; Tue-Sat night without/dinner 4000/8000 CFP) A Tahitian cultural village where tourists can watch local people 'living' in the traditional way. The 60-person dance performances here are the biggest on the island. A ticket with dinner and the evening dance performance lets you in free for activities during the day also.

SHOPPING

The coastal road is littered with souvenir places. For *pareu*, T-shirts and other curios, try the Lili Shop, Maison Blanche and Vaimiti, between the airport and Cook's Bay. At Cook's Bay stop at Honu Iti Boutique and the boutique in the Club Bali Hai. Mo'orea has a number of art galleries, such as Galerie van der Heyde (p606) at Cook's Bay and La Poterie de L'Aquarium – Teva Yrondy close to the Kaveka Hotel.

The major black-pearl specialists have outlets on Mo'orea.

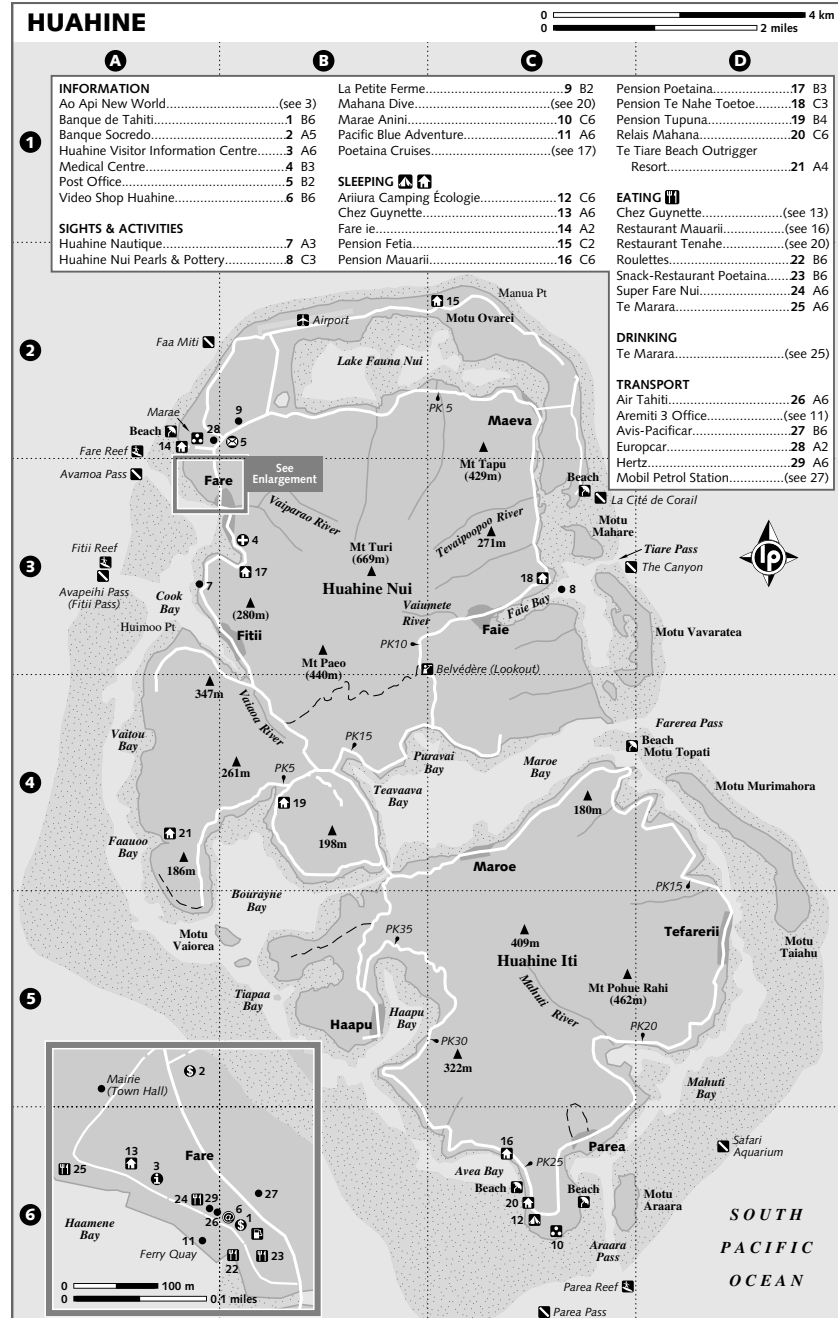
Maison du Tiki (Le Petit Village, Hauru Point) Offers sculptures and Polynesian art.

Woody Sculptures (☎ 56 37 00; Papetoai) This place, just before the Hauru Point enclave, has woodcarvings by the well-respected Woody.

HUAHINE

pop 5741 / area 75 sq km

Relatively secret, unpretentious and authentically Polynesian, Huahine is a place to just kick back and watch the world float by. Although some find its sleepy vibe and lack of posh pampering boring, others, especially surfer and backpacker types (and us), fall hard for Huahine's savage beauty, lower prices and 'take it sloooowww' attitude. This island has it all. Blessed with untouched beaches, isolated coves, enchanted lagoons, killer reef-breaks and the most extensive complex of pre-European *marae* in



French Polynesia, Huahine's also managed to escape the rampant overdevelopment afflicting her sister isles. There's only one real luxury resort, and locals aren't keen on seeing any more. They'd rather keep their island just as it is – mellow.

Huahine is comprised of two islands of fairly similar size: Huahine Nui (Big Huahine) to the north and Huahine Iti (Little Huahine) to the south. Huahine Nui is more developed and noisy, home to the bustling little village of Fare and most of the main tourist and administrative facilities. Huahine Iti offers the island's best beaches, most azure lagoons and a serene, get-away-from-it-all atmosphere.

ORIENTATION

A 60km, mostly sealed, road follows the coast most of the way around both islands. A series of *motu* stretches along the east coast of the two islands, while around the north coast of Huahine Nui is Lake Fauna Nui. It almost cuts off the northern peninsula, where the airport is, from the rest of Huahine Nui. There are only a few beaches.

Fare, the principal town, is on the west coast of Huahine Nui. Faie and Maeva, on the east coast, and Fiti, on the west, are the other main settlements on Huahine Nui. Huahine Iti has four villages: Haapu, Parea, Tefarerii and Maroe.

INFORMATION

There's a bank opposite the quay in Fare and another on the bypass road parallel to Fare's main street. Both have ATMs. Visiting yachts can get water from Pacific Blue Adventure, on the quay. The *capitaine* (harbour master's office) is also on the quay.

Ao Api New World (☎ 68 70 99; per hr 900 CFP) Look for this Internet café in the same building as the visitor information centre.

Huahine visitor information centre (☎ 68 78 81; ☎ 7.30-11.30am Mon-Sat) On Fare's main street.

Medical Centre (☎ 68 82 20; ☎ 24hr) On the bypass road in Fare; it handles minor emergencies.

Post office To the north of Fare towards the airport.

Video Shop Huahine (☎ 60 67 40; per hr 900 CFP; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 5-8pm Sun) Internet access.

TRANSPORT

There are regular flights to Huahine from surrounding islands.

Getting There & Away

Huahine's airport is 2.5km from Fare. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 68 77 02; ☎ 7.30-11.45am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.30am Sat) runs all flights and has an office on Fare's main street. Destinations include Pape'ete (from 10,000 CFP, three to five times daily), Ra'iatea (from 5500 CFP, daily) and Bora Bora (from 7500 CFP, daily).

The **Aremiti 3** links Pape'ete, Huahine and Ra'iatea twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday. It departs Pape'ete at 7am and arrives at Huahine at 10.45am. From Pape'ete to Huahine costs 4500/2500 CFP per adult/child; from Huahine to Ra'iatea costs 2000/800 CFP per adult/child (the boat leaves at around 11am). The **Aremiti 3 office** (☎ 74 39 40, 73 52 73, 68 75 16; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-3pm) is on the quay in the centre of Fare.

Inter-island cargo ships are another option, although less reliable. The *Vaeanu* and *Hawaiki Nui* depart from Pape'ete and stop at Huahine. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

Getting Around

From the airport a taxi costs 750 CFP to go to Fare and 1500 CFP to go to the south of the island.

To rent a car check out one of the three operators on the island. **Hertz** (☎ 66 76 85) is right on the main strip in Fare and has the best deal. Cars cost only 5500 CFP per 24 hours with unlimited mileage. They're a little junky looking, and most lack air-con, but are well worth it for the price. **Avis-Pacificar** (☎ 68 73 34; per 24hr 8500 CFP) is next to the Mobil petrol station in Fare, it also has a counter at the airport. **Europcar** (☎ 68 82 59; per 24hr 9500 CFP) is near the post office, at the airport and the Relais Mahana.

Public transport on Huahine doesn't really exist. If you need a taxi, call **Moe's Taxi** (☎ 72 80 60). Moe speaks perfect English and will take you anywhere on the island at any time. Prices are reasonable.

For scooters, check with Europcar.

HUAHINE NUI

This 60km clockwise circuit of the larger island starts at **Fare**, the image of a sleepy South Seas port. The smells of hamburger grease and freshly caught fish linger in the sticky air and the place vibrates with the

(Continued from page 612)

pumping bass of Tahitian reggae. There's not a lot to do, but that's part of Fare's appeal. Check out the colourful little waterside **market** and the few creative boutiques, sign up for a dive or rent a ramshackle bicycle and just pedal around.

The most extensive complex of pre-European *marae* in French Polynesia is on Huahine. **Maeva** village was the seat of royal power on the island and nearly 30 *marae* are scattered along the shoreline among the village's modern buildings, and up Matairea (Pleasant Wind) Hill; this area is well worth exploring. It takes about two hours to explore the *marae* around Maeva village. Start at the defence wall on the Fare side of Maeva. From here a trail goes uphill through forest and vanilla plantations; a side path leads to the multitiered **Te Ana** or Matairea Huiarii. This complex has *marae*, houses and agricultural terraces dating from 1300 to 1800, with signs of an earlier settlement from 900 AD. A side path winds through the forest to **Marae Tefano**, where a banyan tree overwhelms one end of the *ahu*. Further on, a trail branches left to **Marae Matairea Rahi**. Return to the main trail and continue to the steep side path to **Marae Paepae Ofata**. It's worth the effort: the *marae* is perched on the edge of the hill and has fine views. Return to the main path, which winds around the hillside to **Marae Tamata Uporu** before dropping steeply to the road.

From Maeva the coast road turns inland beside narrow Faie Bay to the village of **Faie**. While you're in the area, don't miss a visit to **Huahine Nui Pearls & Pottery** (☎ 78 30 20; www.huahinepearlfarm.com; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm). Peter Owen, the owner, is a potter as well as a pearl farmer and his work is shown in Pape'ete galleries. Peter's studio is on his pearl farm in the middle of the lagoon. From Faie a ferry departs for the studio every 15 minutes between 10am and 3pm.

Huahine's famous blue-eyed eels can be seen in the river immediately downstream of the bridge. It's a steep climb to the **belvédère** on the slopes of Mt Turi. The road weaves through farms before returning to Fare.

HUAHINE ITI

Start at the village of Maroe, on the south side of Maroe Bay, and head clockwise to **Marae Anini**, the community *marae* on the

island's southern tip. Made of massive coral blocks, this large coastal *marae* was dedicated to 'Oro (the god of war) and Hiro (the god of thieves and sailors) but is now sadly neglected. Some of the best **beaches** around Huahine are found on the southern peninsula and along its western shore around Avea Bay.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Huahine has some great dive spots, including a canyon where you can see barracuda, jackfish, rays and trey sharks. The island's two dive companies both charge around 6000 CFP for a single tank dive, 7000 CFP for an introductory dive. **Mahana Dive** (☎ 68 76 32; www.mahanadive.com; Avea Bay), run by the exuberant, English-speaking Annie, is an excellent dive shop offering a hands-on experience. On the quay in Fare, **Pacific Blue Adventure** (☎ 68 87 21; www.divehuahine.com) is another friendly centre.

Fare has a pretty, sandy **beach** just north of the town. The wide, superclear lagoon drops off quickly here providing some fabulous snorkelling amid stunning coral and dense fish populations. Just south of Maeva, near the visitor car park at the now defunct Sofitel, you'll find **La Cité de Corail**, which offers more superb snorkelling.

Horse Riding

La Petite Ferme (☎ 68 82 98; 2hr/day trip 4500/10,000 CFP), just north of Fare, offers guided horse-riding trips.

Surfing

Huahine has some of the best and most consistent surf in French Polynesia: left and right reef-breaks best tackled by experienced surfers. Local surfers can be very possessive, however, so be sure to respect their domain.

Swimming

Around the hotel and guesthouse area of southwestern Huahine Iti, there's a beautiful white-sand **beach** and the lagoon here is very wide and good for swimming.

Walking

Walking opportunities are limited to the *marae* walk at Maeva, the 3km trail inland to the *belvédère* and a one-hour circuit from

(Continued on page 621)

Parea on Huahine Iti; you need a guide to climb Mt Turi (669m) from Fare.

TOURS

The Huahine lagoon is superb and includes many untouched *motu* accessible only by boat. A variety of **lagoon tours** (per person around 7500 CFP) are offered, with stops for snorkelling, swimming, fish feeding and a *motu*. Try the following outfits, both just south of Fare:

Huahine Nautique (☎ 68 83 15)

Poetania Cruises (☎ 68 89 49)

Several operators run three-hour island tours for about 4500 CFP per person; try the following:

Felix Tours (☎ 68 81 69)

Huahine Explorer (☎ 69 87 33)

Huahine Land (☎ 68 89 21)

SLEEPING

Most of Huahine Nui's accommodation options are in and around Fare, and staying near the main village means easy access to shops, restaurants, banks and car-hire facilities. There's no question Huahine Iti's beaches put Huahine Nui's to shame, but if you choose to stay on the smaller island, and don't have a car, you'll have to rely on hitchhiking to get around – though it's not really all that difficult, plus all three places to stay on Huahine Iti serve some type of food.

Fare & Around

Fare ie (☎ 60 63 77; www.tahitisafari.com; luxury tents US\$150) A unique choice, it offers digs in two African-themed luxury safari tents right on the beach. The fabulous tents feature high ceilings, wooden floors, creative artwork and large beds with fluffy duvets. There is a funky, gnarled-wood self-catering kitchen, and free snorkels, kayaks and bicycles.

Chez Guynette (☎ 68 83 75; chezguynette@mail.pf; dm/s/d 2000/4500/5500 CFP) The seven rooms with en-suite hot water baths and fans are good value; dorms are spacious and clean and there's a big communal kitchen – if there are enough guests, it can turn into a bit of an impromptu party venue. Book ahead. The on-site shady terrace restaurant is perfect for people watching.

Pension Fétia (☎ 72 09 50; bungalows from 7000 CFP) This totally mellow place is in an isolated location right on the beach. It offers thatched

bungalows nestled amid grooves of coconut palms. The sunsets are awesome! Meals can be arranged.

Pension Poetania (☎ 68 89 49; www.poetania.com; d from 8000 CFP; ☎ ☎) An immaculately kept place with generously sized rooms done up in pastel colours. The cheapest rooms share bathrooms and don't have air-con, but are still large and really inviting. A giant self-catering kitchen and lovely upper-level dining terrace are perks. Sadly, it can get a bit noisy.

Around Huahine Nui

Pension Te Nahe Toetoe (☎ 68 71 43; s/d 3000/4500 CFP) Popular with surfers, backpackers or anyone looking for an authentic Polynesian homestay, this place is fabulous value and quite unique. Digs are in the owner's house, and somewhat lacking in privacy, but you're paying for experience more than comfort. There's a communal kitchen, free airport transfers and meals can be arranged. It's near Faie.

Pension Tupuna (☎ 68 70 21; bungalows 6500 CFP) Travellers give this guesthouse rave reviews. The three Polynesian-style bungalows are set in a lush tropical garden bursting with exotic trees. The friendly owner is an amateur horticulturist, and happy to dish about the local ecology. Meals (2000 CFP) are served family-style; free airport transfers.

Te Tiare Beach Outrigger Resort (☎ 60 60 50; www.tetiarebeachresort.com; bungalows 36,000–80,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Huahine's one true luxury resort satiates the white-sand beach, coconut-palm, azure-lagoon fantasy. The 41 bungalows (11 of which are perched over the shimmering lagoon) are not just posh; they also blend into the environment beautifully. Te Tiare can only be reached by boat; airport transfers cost 5500 CFP return, shuttles to the mainland 500 CFP one way.

Huahine Iti

The (marginally) smaller island has several ideally situated places as well as the most beautiful beaches and widest lagoon. Shops are limited, however.

Pension Mauarii (☎ 68 86 49; www.mauarii.com; Avea Bay; r/bungalows from 7500/10,000 CFP; ☎) With a variety of rooms and bungalows constructed from local materials, this guesthouse is full of character and is our favourite place to stay on Huahine Iti. Polished oyster shell

shingles and knobby wood coffee tables add funky touches. The locale, right on the beach, is fabulous and there are loads of water activities offered.

Ariura Camping Écologie (☎ 52 26 32; Avea Bay; camp sites/bungalows 1500/4500 CFP) Backpackers give this place great reviews for its location, price and tranquillity. In a junglelike setting right on the beach, and near prime surfing spots, you can either pitch a tent or stay in the simple local-style dwellings. There's a communal kitchen and a small grocery shop just 300m away.

Relais Mahana (☎ 68 81 54; Avea Bay; www.relaismahana.com; bungalows from 20,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) It's got a great beachside location and a restaurant serving delicious food (see Restaurant Tenahe, right) but we can't help feeling the Polynesian-styled bungalows are just a tad overpriced. Sure they have all the modern amenities, but they lack the sex appeal of similarly priced places. Airport transfers are 1500 CFP one way.

EATING

Most of Huahine's places to eat are found near Fare. The quayside *roulettes* in Fare are Huahine's best bargain for cheap eats. They operate from early morning until late at night. Fish, chicken, burgers, steaks and chips are the order of the day, and a meal typically costs around 800 CFP to 1200 CFP. Fare has several well-stocked food shops, including Super Fare Nui, opposite the waterfront.

Restaurant Mauarii (☎ 68 86 49; Avea Bay; dishes 1500–4500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) In a traditional reed hut overlooking the sea at Pension Mauarii on Huahine Iti, it serves some of the best food on the island. The Polynesian

menu features local delicacies and the ambience is so chill, you could kick your feet up on the chair and pull out a novel and no-one would blink. Don't miss out on the house speciality drink, *pau ti punch* – it has a serious kick!

Chez Guynette (☎ 68 83 75; Fare; dishes 500–1000 CFP; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Locals are apt to arrive at breakfast and stay through cocktail hour, reading the paper, chatting with the owners or just watching Fare's world go by from the open-air terrace. The menu is simple, offering breakfast dishes, burgers and the best fruit smoothies on the island.

Restaurant Tenahe (☎ 68 81 54; dishes 1000–3000 CFP, set menu 3000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This eatery, at Relais Mahana, gets favourable word-of-mouth reviews along with our stamp of approval. The dinner menu features well-presented local specialities with a welcome original twist. At lunch choose from giant thin-crust pizzas, salads, curries or fresh fish.

Snack-Restaurant Poetania (☎ 68 80 50; dishes 1000–1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Run by the same friendly folks that own Pension Poetania down the street, the Chinese food served here is quite good – if you order right. The appetiser *nam* (similar to fried egg rolls) is a must and the chow mein is also yummy. Skip the lemon chicken.

DRINKING

There are three ways to entertain yourself at night on Huahine: curl up in bed with a bottle of Bordeaux and a trashy novel; cruise the Fare strip with your pals (a blaring radio is mandatory) then park by the quay and spend a while shooting the shit over bottles of Hinano; or head to Huahine's only bar.

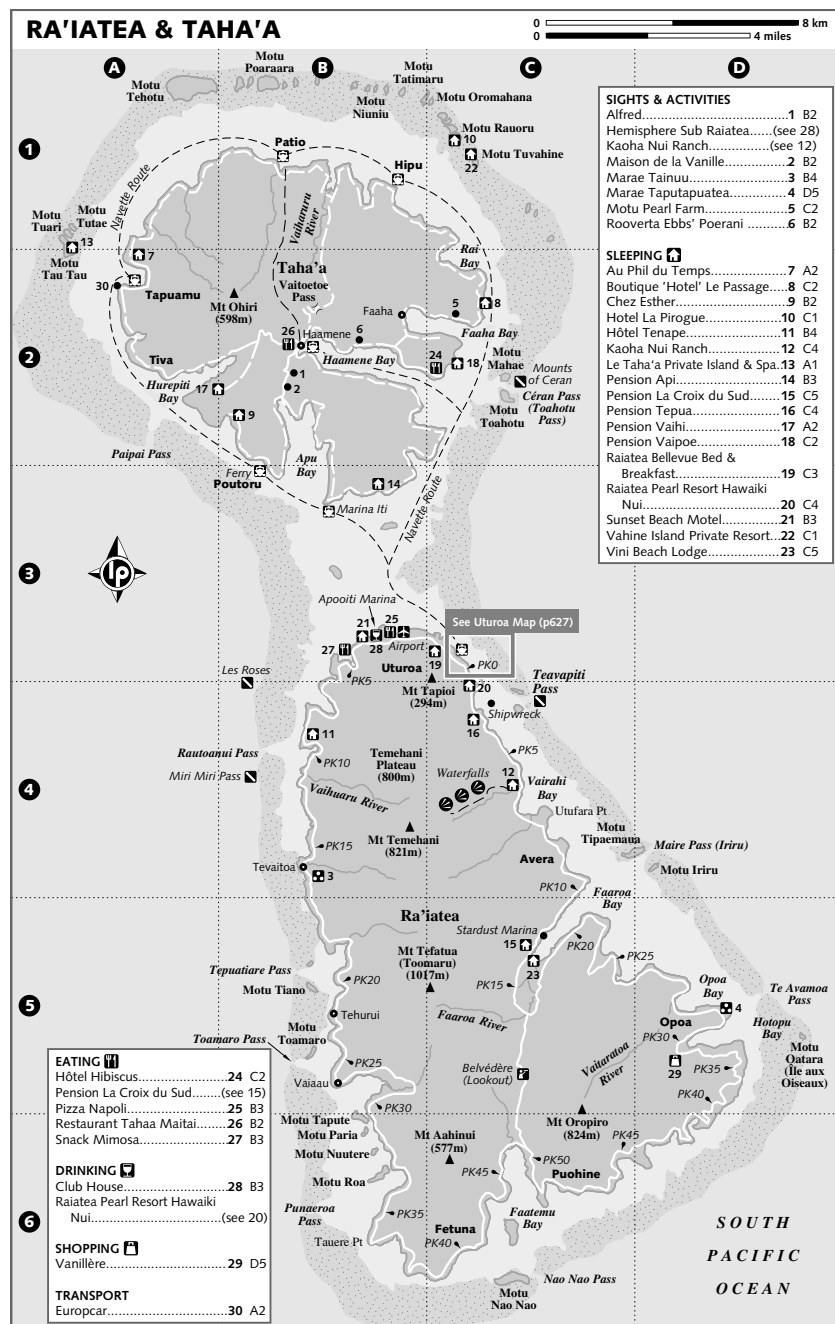
Te Marara (☎ 68 70 81) This beach shack bar in Fare stays open until midnight and is the place to party on Huahine. Linger over a fruity cocktail as the sun sinks low on the horizon or get rowdy over a few jugs with friends after the dinner crowd heads home.

RA'IA TEA & TAHA'A

The twin islands of Ra'iatea and Taha'a feel a world removed from their Society Island sisters. Decidedly less touristy, these two allow you to experience a sophisticated yet old-fashioned face of Polynesia usually

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Te Marara (☎ 68 70 81; dishes 1500–2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A lively restaurant right on the lagoon, this favourite local water hole is the best place to eat around Fare. With polished oyster shells nailed to the walls and coloured lights strewn from the thatched ceiling, it has a beach-bar vibe and cooks a mean shrimp curry. The menu is meat and seafood based, the portions are generous and mains come with a choice of starch and vegetable on the side.



veiled from visitors. Away from the roaring jet skis, unabashedly extravagant resorts and endless souvenir shops found on other islands, this is a place where locals still live life on their own terms: slowly, traditionally and with a profound respect for both their heritage and history. It's not that the islands don't embrace tourism, they do, it's just not their only means of survival; agriculture and governmental posts are the primary industries here. Home to some of Polynesia's most important ancient places of worship, Ra'iatea and Taha'a emanate a magical, mythical, mysterious vibe.

Transport

The airport is on Ra'iatea, so most visitors arrive here first. Transport between the islands is easy.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Tahiti (☎ 60 04 44; ✈ 7.30am-noon & 2-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.15am Sat, 2.30-5.15pm Sun) has an office at the airport. The airline offers direct flights from Tahiti (from 12,000 CFP, eight daily) with connections via Mo'orea (from 13,000 CFP) and Huahine (from 5500 CFP). There are also direct flights to Bora Bora (from 6500 CFP, daily) and Maupiti (from 6500 CFP, three times weekly).

Some Taha'a hotels will collect their guests on Ra'iatea (sometimes free, or for 2000 to 4000 CFP).

Boat

A couple of *navette* (shuttle boat) services (1000 CFP) between Uturoa, on Ra'iatea, and various stops on Taha'a – Iti Marina, Poutoru, Tiva, Tapuamu, Amaru quay and Haamene – are operated by **Enota Transport** (☎ 65 67 10). Services operate Monday to Friday and Saturday morning.

There is also a **taxi-boat service** (☎ 65 65 29) between the two islands, which operates daily between 6am and 6pm. It costs 2000 CFP to go to southern Taha'a and 4000 CFP to go to northern Taha'a (prices are per person, with a minimum of two people). You can be picked up at the airport or any of the accessible pontoons. Advance booking (24 hours) is required.

The **Aremiti 3** (☎ 74 39 40) departs from Pape'ete stopping at Huahine and Ra'iatea

on Monday and Friday. It departs Pape'ete at 7am and arrives at Ra'iatea towards noon; from Ra'iatea it departs at 12.30pm and arrives at Pape'ete at 6pm. From Pape'ete to Ra'iatea costs 5500/3000 CFP per adult/child; from Huahine to Ra'iatea costs 2000/900 CFP per adult/child.

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) travels between Bora Bora, Taha'a and Ra'iatea. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday it leaves Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 7am, arrives at Taha'a at 8.15am and at Uturoa, Ra'iatea, at 8.45am. The same days it leaves Uturoa at 4pm, stops at Taha'a and arrives back at Bora Bora at 5.45pm. The one-way/return fare is 2500/3500 CFP; it costs 500 CFP to go from Ra'iatea to Taha'a.

The cargo ships *Vaeamu*, *Taporo*, *Hawaiki Nui* and *Maupiti Tou A'i'a* also make a stop at Ra'iatea. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

The **Tamarii Taha'a** (☎ 65 65 29) goes to the west coast of Taha'a twice daily from the Uturoa *navette* quay, at around 10.30am and 4.30pm. The one-hour trip to Patio on Taha'a costs 900 CFP.

GETTING AROUND Ra'iatea

If you've booked accommodation, most places will meet you at the airport (for a fee). Otherwise, the 3km taxi trip into Uturoa costs about 1000 CFP. There's a **taxi stand** (Map p627; ☎ 66 20 60) by the market but the taxis are very expensive.

Around the island you can rent a car or hitchhike: hitching appears to be fairly acceptable as a result of the low-key tourism and lack of public transport. Don't count on *le trucks*.

Europcar (Map p627; ☎ 66 34 06; europcar-loc@mail.pf; Uturoa) and **Hertz** (Map p627; ☎ 66 44 88; Uturoa) hire cars for around \$100 per day.

Europcar has scooters for 6500 CFP for 24 hours; some guesthouses hire bicycles. Europcar rents boats with outboards.

Taha'a

There is no public transport system on Taha'a. **Europcar** (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 00; fax 65 68 08) charges 8600 CFP for 24 hours including unlimited mileage and insurance. It also rents bikes. You can rent a scooter on Ra'iatea and bring it across on the *navette*.

RA'ITEA

pop 3568 / area 170 sq km

Ra'iatea has no beaches (although there are many fine strips of sand on its outlying *motu*), but does have some very popular marinas. Best known as French Polynesia's sailing and yachting centre, it attracts hundreds of luxury water rats each year. Also regarded as French Polynesia's most sacred isle, Ra'iatea played an integral role in ancient Polynesian religious beliefs and is home to Marae Taputapuātea, the most important traditional temple in Polynesia. Spirituality is still a fundamental component of island life today, with many places of worship scattered across the island.

We'll be honest though, if you're short on time, and envisioning dreamy blue lagoons and white-sand beaches, this probably isn't the island for you. The outlying *motu* have some fabulous beaches, but none of these are inhabited (meaning you won't be staying next to that gorgeous water). If you're an archaeology buff, or interested in a cultural rather than beach experience, you'll love this place.

Orientation

Ra'iatea's road hugs the coast.

The mountainous interior includes the 800m-high Temehani Plateau and 1017m Mt Tefatua (Toomaru).

The airport is at the northern tip of the island. Uturoa extends southeast of the airport. Small villages are scattered across the rest of the island.

Information

The three French Polynesian banks have branches with ATMs in Uturoa.

Hospital (Map p627; ☎ 60 08 01) Opposite the post office in Uturoa, it offers emergency services.

ITS Multimedia (Map p627; ☎ 60 25 25; per hr 900 CFP) Internet access in Uturoa; look for it inside an electronics store.

Post office (Map p627) North of the centre of Uturoa towards the airport.

Raitea visitor information centre (Map p627; ☎ 60 07 77; info@raitea@mail.pf; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat, 9.30am-3pm Sun) In the *gare maritime* (boat terminal) in Uturoa.

Sights

We'd recommend renting a vehicle (or if you are in really good shape, a bicycle) and driving the entire the 98km sealed circuit

around Ra'iatea. Exploring the island this way gives a taste of its wild natural beauty (think mossy mountains and shimmering lagoons). Take a picnic, as there's nowhere to buy lunch.

Uturoa (Map p627), Ra'iatea's busy port, is the second-largest town in French Polynesia, and is one of those places where its utter lack of charm is actually charming. Take some time to wander around: the place provides a sample of the local flavour, plus there's some funky little shops and great deals on black pearls. The Protestant church on the north side of the town centre has a memorial stone to pioneer missionary John Williams. Mt Tapioi (294m) overlooks Uturoa.

Soon after passing the Stardust Marina (Map p624) a turn-off heads to the south coast. Turn right here to climb to a **belvédère** (Map p624) with great views of Faaroa Bay.

Or turn left to reach **Marae Taputapuātea** (Map p624), which had immense importance to the ancient Polynesians. Any *marae* built on another island had to incorporate one of Taputapuātea's stones as a symbol of allegiance – even one in the Cook Islands or Hawai'i! At the very end of the cape is the smaller **Marae Tauraa**, a *tapu* enclosure with the tall 'stone of investiture' where young *ari'i* (chiefs) were enthroned.

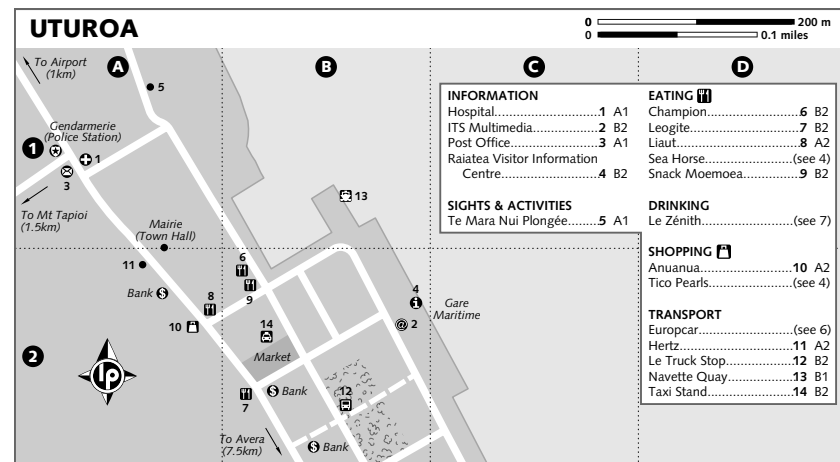
At Tevaitoa village, on the northwestern side of the island, massive stone slabs stand in the 50m-long wall of **Marae Tainuu** (Map p624), behind the church (the church was built on the *marae*). Turn-offs lead to the Temehani Plateau on the stretch to the Apooiti Marina (Map p624) then the road passes the airport and returns to Uturoa.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Ra'iatea has two diving centres: **Hemisphere Sub Raitea** (Map p624; ☎ 66 12 49; www.diveraiatea.com), at the Apooiti Marina, and **Te Mara Nui Plongee** (Map p627; ☎ 66 11 88; www.temaranui.pf), at the marina in Uturoa. Both companies charge around 5500 CFP for a one-tank excursion, 6000 CFP for an introductory dive, and provide transport from your hotel. There are about 10 dive sites along the east and west coasts and around Taha'a. A highlight is the superb Teavapiti Pass.

Ra'iatea has no beaches – a hotel or guest-house pontoon is the most you can expect – but some of the reef *motu* are splendid, and



perfect for swimming or snorkelling. Ask at your accommodation about renting a boat or joining a lagoon tour.

HORSE RIDING

The respected **Kaoha Nui Ranch** (Map p624; ☎ 66 25 46; trips from 4500 CFP), 6km south of Uturoa, offers a variety of riding trips lasting from two hours to half a day.

WALKING

Good walking opportunities include the walk up to the **Temehani Plateau** (Map p624; you need a guide); the short climb up **Mt Tapioi** (Map p624); the **Three Waterfalls walk** behind Kaoha Nui Ranch; and Hotopu, Opoa and Faeratai Valleys in the southwest.

YACHTING

Ra'iatea is the yacht-charter centre of French Polynesia. Bareboat charter rates vary seasonally (July to August is the high season). Cruises on a crewed yacht usually include tour programmes at the stops en route. It takes eight to 10 days to explore the Leeward Islands from Ra'iatea. For info on charter companies, see p669.

Tours

Most tours actually spend the majority of their time on Taha'a, but all companies listed here pick up from the pier in Uturoa. Tours generally involve travel by *pirogue* (local outrigger canoes) and 4WD minibus, dividing their time between Taha'a's rugged

interior and splendid lagoon. Unless stated otherwise, all visit a pearl and vanilla plantation, stop for snorkelling and include lunch on a *motu*.

Almost Paradise Tours (☎ 66 23 64; tours 6000 CFP)

Recommended archaeology tours in English; focus on Polynesian culture and history. Three hours.

Dave's Tours (☎ 65 62 42; tours 8000 CFP)

L'excursion Bleue (☎ 66 10 90; www.tahaa.net; tours 9500 CFP)

Tahaa Tour Excursions (☎ 65 62 18; tours 6500 CFP)

Sleeping

Places to stay on Ra'iatea are generally in or close to Uturoa.

UTUROA

Raitea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui (Map p624; ☎ 60 05 00; www.pearlresorts.com; r from 20,000 CFP, bungalows 26,000-50,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) The over-water bungalows, extending over a clifflike reef face, more than compensate for the lack of stunning views at Ra'iatea's swankiest resort. Snorkelling from your balcony is a real rush – you get the sensation of soaring thanks to a superquick drop off. Kayaks, bikes and snorkels are available; the bar and restaurant is very popular. *Motu* transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

Pension Tepua (Map p624; ☎ 66 33 00; www.raia tea.com/tupua; dm/s/d/bungalows 2500/5000/7500/10,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) This friendly guesthouse offers quality accommodation at reasonable prices. The owner speaks five languages, including perfect English, and is very friendly.

Rooms and bungalows are simple, but very clean; dorms are spacious. The on-site bar and restaurant, communal kitchen, and alfresco TV lounge add lively ambience.

Raiatea Bellevue Bed & Breakfast (Map p624; ☎ 66 15 15; s/d incl breakfast 4000/8000 CFP; 🍷) Extraordinary views and a lush jungle-like setting are top qualities at this quiet and relaxing place perched high above the northern side of Uturoa. The five rooms are small but tidy. Airport transfers cost 1400 CFP per person return. To get here, take the first sealed road on the left after PK1 and follow it for 800m.

EAST COAST

There are quite a few places to choose from along the east coast.

Vini Beach Lodge (Map p624; ☎ 60 22 45; www.raiatea.com/vinibeach; bungalows 11,000–14,000 CFP; 🍷) Vini Beach is a very classy-looking place. Brand new, it offers a collection of soothing two-storey whitewashed bungalows and an alfresco restaurant and bar. The bungalows are spacious and elegant, featuring porches overlooking the marina, kitchenettes and lovely cast-iron beds. Try for a sea-facing bungalow; not only are the views better, they're also cooler. Return airport transfers are 800 CFP per person.

Pension La Croix du Sud (Southern Cross; Map p624; ☎ 66 27 55; s/d incl breakfast 7500/8500 CFP, half board per person 9500/14,000 CFP) High on top a steep hill, this *pension* offers three rooms with seriously fabulous views. The place is a bit isolated but there are free bicycles for getting around. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per carload.

Kaoha Nui Ranch (Map p624; ☎ 66 25 46; kaoha.nui@mail.pf; r/bungalow 3500/6500 CFP) An excellent-value laid-back establishment where horses graze on the front lawn and travellers lounge in the open-air sitting area. Rooms are simple and share bathrooms, but are also impeccably clean. There's a fully equipped kitchen and meals can be arranged. Airport and dock transfers are free.

WEST COAST

Sunset Beach Motel (Map p624; ☎ 66 33 47; www.raiatea.com/sunsetbeach; camping per person 1200 CFP, s/d/tr bungalows 9000/10,000/11,000 CFP) Set amid coconut palms and right on the water, Sunset Beach has some of the best bungalows on the island: they're giant with separate kitchen,

sleeping and lounge areas. Huge windows and creaky porches are extra perks. *Pirogues*, bikes and airport transfers are free. There's a snack place just down the road.

Hôtel Tenape (Map p624; ☎ 60 01 00; www.hoteltenape.com; r from 21,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The island's second-poshest place, this two-storey colonial-style establishment offers comfortable and modern rooms with large terraces and good views. The restaurant has a solid reputation and the bar can get lively. Add 5500 CFP for half board.

Eating

Uturoa has several well-stocked supermarkets including Champion (Map p627) on the seafloor and Leogite (Map p627) and Liaut (Map p627) on the main street.

Pizza Napoli (Map p624; ☎ 66 10 77; dishes 1100–1600 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) We loved the hearty food and *tiki*-bar atmosphere at this congenial pizzeria in a reed hut with loads of flowers. It's just outside Uturoa. The pasta dishes are quite good.

Pension La Croix du Sud (Map p624; ☎ 66 27 55; set menu 3000 CFP; 🍷 dinner) You'll need to book in advance to eat here, but it's worth the hassle. The views from the terrace tables are unbeatable, the fusion cuisine tasty and inventive. The menu always changes, so ask what's available when you ring.

Snack Moemoea (Map p627; ☎ 66 39 84; dishes 500–1500 CFP; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) On the waterfront in Uturoa, this funky little place offers a big menu with a huge choice of *poisson cru* (a popular raw fish dish) options. It's particularly good for budget travellers.

Sea Horse (Map p627; ☎ 66 16 34; dishes 900–1800 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner, closed Sun dinner) In Uturoa's *gare maritime*, Sea Horse is a popular Chinese restaurant with a reputation for good service and consistent food. The menu features lots of seafood and coconut milk-infused options.

Snack Mimosa (Map p624; ☎ 66 26 74; dishes from 900 CFP; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Within easy walking distance of the Sunset Beach Motel, this typical snack place offers the usual assortment of simple Tahitian- and French-influenced dishes: *poisson cru*, burgers, steaks and omelettes are all on the menu.

Drinking

It's difficult to find a reason for a late night on Ra'iatea.

Le Zénith (Map p627; admission female/male free/1000 CFP) On weekends Restaurant Moana, above Leogite in Uturoa, metamorphoses into this disco. It's popular mainly with young locals.

Club House (Map p624; ☎ 66 11 66; dishes 1500–3000 CFP) A sunset drink at this place in the Apooiti Marina is mandatory. The restaurant may not serve the best food, but the mellow ambience – think at alfresco wooden benches set on grassy lawns and scarred tables under a traditional thatched roof – is as fantastic as the sunset views.

Entertainment

Raiatea Pearl Resort Hawaiki Nui (Map p624; ☎ 60 05 00) The bar at this resort also offers great lagoon views, and stages weekly Polynesian dance performances – call about prices.

Shopping

Women sell crafts including shellwork, woodwork and *pareu* next to the *gare maritime*.

Anuanua gallery (Map p627; Uturoa) This gallery in Uturoa features works by island craftspeople, including sculptures, pottery, paintings and mother-of-pearl objects. It has also sells rather unique pieces of jewellery, including black pearl, shell and coconut rope bracelets and necklaces.

Tico Pearls (Map p627; ☎ 60 06 88) In the *gare maritime*. The owner of this shop speaks excellent English and offers black pearls for all budgets. Bracelets made from imperfect pearls are particularly good value. Ask about discounts.

Vanillière (Map p624; ☎ 66 15 61) One of the best places to buy all sorts vanilla products; it's located at Hotopu Bay.

TAHA'A

pop 4845 / area 90 sq km

Quieter and even lusier than Ra'iatea, Taha'a is little known by tourist operators and accessible only by boat. It has a raw, untouched feel, and the island's verdant velvet hills are home to exotic fruit trees, forests of bamboo and palm, steep dirt hiking paths and sweetly scented vanilla plantations. A dip into the tepid lagoon reveals all the usual tropical wonders: fiery coral and colourful fish. There are no beaches to speak of on Taha'a. There are plenty of fine stretches of sand on the outlying *motu*, and

unlike those off Ra'iatea you can actually sleep there.

A coast road encircles most of the island but traffic is very light and there is no public transport. Vanilla cultivation and pearl farming dominate the island's economy. The main tourist attraction is the string of beautiful *motu* along the northern reef edge. Taha'a's easily navigable lagoon and safe yacht anchorages make it a favourite for visiting yachties.

The population is concentrated in eight main villages on the coast. The main quay is at Tapuamu; Patio is the main town. The roads around the south and north part of the island meet at Haamene.

Taha'a's only bank is the Banque Socredo in Patio, where there's also a post office.

Around the Island

The 70km circuit of the island is quite possible as a bicycle day trip, although most of the route is unsealed crushed coral and there are some steep sections. Starting from the Marina Iti, the first *navette* stop from Ra'iatea and the best place to hire bicycles; the road hugs the coast around Apu Bay. At the top of the bay the route leaves the coast and climbs up and over to **Haamene** (Map p624) village. The **Maison de la Vanille** (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 27) and **Alfred** (Map p624; ☎ 65 61 16) are vanilla producers worth a visit. Pause for pictures just after **Tapuamu** (Map p624), when a chain of *motu* fringing the northern coast of the island comes into view – it's quite stunning. You'll pass through copra plantations on the way to Faaha Bay on the island's eastern side; stop on the north side of the bay and pay a visit **Motu Pearl Farm** (Map p624; ☎ 65 66 67). You can take a tour and purchase loose pearls (often cheaper than from a shop). There are more pearl farms along the coast road closer to Haamene, including **Rooverta Ebbs' Poerani** (Map p624; ☎ 65 60 25; admission 100 CFP), where you can watch pearl grafting. The road then winds around seemingly endless small bays before returning to the Marina Iti.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (p630) has the only dive centre on Taha'a. The dive centres on Ra'iatea, however, regularly use the dive sites to the east of the island by

Céran Pass and will collect you from hotels in the south of Taha'a.

There are no beaches on Taha'a, and you have to go to the *motu* for swimming and snorkelling. Ask at your guesthouse about options for getting to the *motu*.

HIKING

Taha'a's interior is so dense, it caters more to bushwalkers than hikers. The only hiking trail into the interior follows a little-used 7km track across the centre of the island from Patio to Haamene, and offers some dazzling views of Haamene Bay.

Tours

Vanilla Tours (☎ 65 62 46) and **Tahaa Tour Excursion** (☎ 65 62 18) have good reputations for their island tours (6500 CFP per person). Ask at your accommodation about lagoon tours (6500 to 8000 CFP per person).

Sleeping

It's wise to make reservations so that you're collected from the appropriate village quay or even the airport on Ra'iatea.

THE ISLAND

Most of the following places either provide or rent bicycles to guests.

Pension Vaipoe (Chez Patricia et Daniel; Map p624; ☎ 65 60 83; v.p@mail.pf; bungalows 8500 CFP) This popular place on the eastern side of Taha'a has a buzzing atmosphere. We liked its easy access to the lagoon and the availability of activities. Digs are no frills, but they have kitchenettes. Add 3500 CFP per person for half board (recommended). Airport transfers cost 3000 CFP per person return.

Chez Esther (Map p624; ☎ 65 62 60; bungalows from 8500 CFP; 🍷) The three bungalows are quite endearing. Chez Esther is a simple and quiet place where relaxation seems to be the top priority. Look for it just beyond Poutoru, on the inland side of the road. Add 3500 CFP per person for half board. Airport transfers cost 1500 CFP per person one way. You can hire a boat for 7000 CFP per half-day.

Au Phil du Temps (Map p624; ☎ 65 64 19; www.pension-au-phil-du-temps.iffrance.com; bungalows per person incl breakfast/half board/full board 5500/9500/12,500 CFP) Kitted out with TVs, mosquito nets and private outside bathrooms, the well-kept, local-style bungalows are just metres from

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Boutique 'Hotel' Le Passage (Map p624; ☎ 65 66 75; residencelepassage@mail.pf; bungalows with half/full board per person 12,000/15,000 CFP; 🍷) Cosy and family-run, this relative newcomer is excellent value. The three peaceful seafaring bungalows are surrounded by lush gardens; the pontoon dock is the perfect place to catch a spectacular sunset. The friendly hosts offer guests free 4WD island tours. Transfers from Ra'iatea cost 6000 CFP per boatload.

the lagoon on the island's western side. Transfers to the airport cost 2000 CFP. No credit cards.

Pension Vaihi (Map p624; ☎ 65 62 02; bungalows 7000 CFP) Head to this family guesthouse on the southern side of Hurepiti Bay for real isolation and tranquillity. The three bungalows are spotless and you can chill out by the lagoon. Half/full board adds 3000/4500 CFP per person. To get there, ask the *navette* to drop you at the quay at Tiva, where the owners will pick you up.

Pension Api (Map p624; ☎ 65 69 88; www.pensionapi.com; r 8000 CFP) Near the sea, it offers two comfortable bungalow-style rooms. Each has a private bathroom, mosquito net and a terrace. To get here, take a *navette* or taxi-boat to the quay and call the owners, who will come and pick you up. Kayaks and bikes are available for guests.

THE MOTU

Le Taha'a Private Island & Spa (Map p624; ☎ 50 84 54; www.letahaa.com; bungalows from 80,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Privacy is paramount at this ultraluxurious, creatively designed resort. The over-water bungalows are as posh as they are roomy; the beachside villas are multiroom affairs with personal plunge pools. Le Tahaa is definitely a destination resort and access to the mainland is limited; luckily the restaurants here are sumptuous. It's a good choice for honeymoons and romantic getaways.

Hotel La Pirogue (Map p624; ☎ 60 81 45; bungalows 22,000 CFP) Intimate, friendly and rustic, this new place appeals to couples and families looking for a bit of luxury at a less exorbitant price. The restaurant has a varied menu and good reputation (we'd suggest

opting for half board, an extra 6500 CFP per person).

Vahine Island Private Island Resort (Map p624; ☎ 65 67 38; www.vahine-island.com; beach bungalows 36,000-55,000 CFP; 🍷) In a picturesque location, this intimate resort has just nine Polynesian-style bungalows, three of which are perched over the lagoon. The digs are not ultraposh but are lovingly decorated, featuring comfy hammocks on wooden terraces. Add 7000 CFP per person per day for half board (recommended as you are literally in the middle of nowhere). Airport transfers cost 6000 CFP per person return.

Eating & Drinking

Dining options are very limited.

Restaurant Tahaa Maitai (Map p624; ☎ 65 70 85; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Right on Haamene Bay, this restaurant is recommended by travellers not only for its fabulous views but also its delicious cuisine: the menu features lots of fresh seafood. There's also a long cocktail list, making it a popular local watering hole.

Hôtel Hibiscus (☎ 65 61 06; dishes 1200-3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Crab and *mahimahi* (dolphin fish) dishes are good choices from the seafood-heavy menu at this hotel/restaurant with a solid reputation. Its bar can be crowded and fun, especially during the Saturday night dance performances. It's on the eastern side of the island.

BORA BORA

pop 5757 / area 47 sq km

James Cook once declared Bora Bora the 'pearl of the Pacific.' His critique made a lasting impression: more than two centuries later this island still symbolises paradise at its most lusty, frivolous and ideal. Legendary for its lush beauty and hedonistic decadence, Bora Bora is a fairy-tale creation of jagged volcanic peaks and crystal-clear aqua lagoons. One of the world's most famous dream destinations, the island lures Louis Vuitton-toting honeymooners, heiresses and movie stars by the planetariums. Of course all this glitter doesn't come free, and some argue Bora Bora is as overhyped and overdeveloped as its stratospheric prices. There's no doubt Bora Bora is overpriced (true luxury here

costs as much as the flawless black pearls). There's also something so souped up and sexy about the place you can't help wanting to throw caution to the wind and live like money is no object.

ORIENTATION

A road circles the island, which is about 9km north to south and 4km across. Vaitape, on the western side, is the main settlement, looking directly out to Teavanui Pass, the only entry to the lagoon.

INFORMATION

If you need medical assistance, inquire at your hotel. There are branches of Banque de Tahiti and Banque Socredo in Vaitape, where you can exchange money or use the ATM.

Bora Bora visitor information centre (☎ 67 76 36; 🕒 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Office on the quay at Vaitape; it has loads of pamphlets and other info.

L'Appétisserie (☎ 67 78 88; Centre Le Pahia; per hr 2500 CFP) Internet access in Vaitape.

Medical centre (☎ 67 70 77; Vaitape)

Pharmacy (☎ 67 70 30; 🕒 8am-noon & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 5-6pm Sat, 9-9.30am Sun) In Vaitape just near Le Cocotier restaurant.

Post office (☎ 67 70 74) In the middle of Vaitape.

TRANSPORT

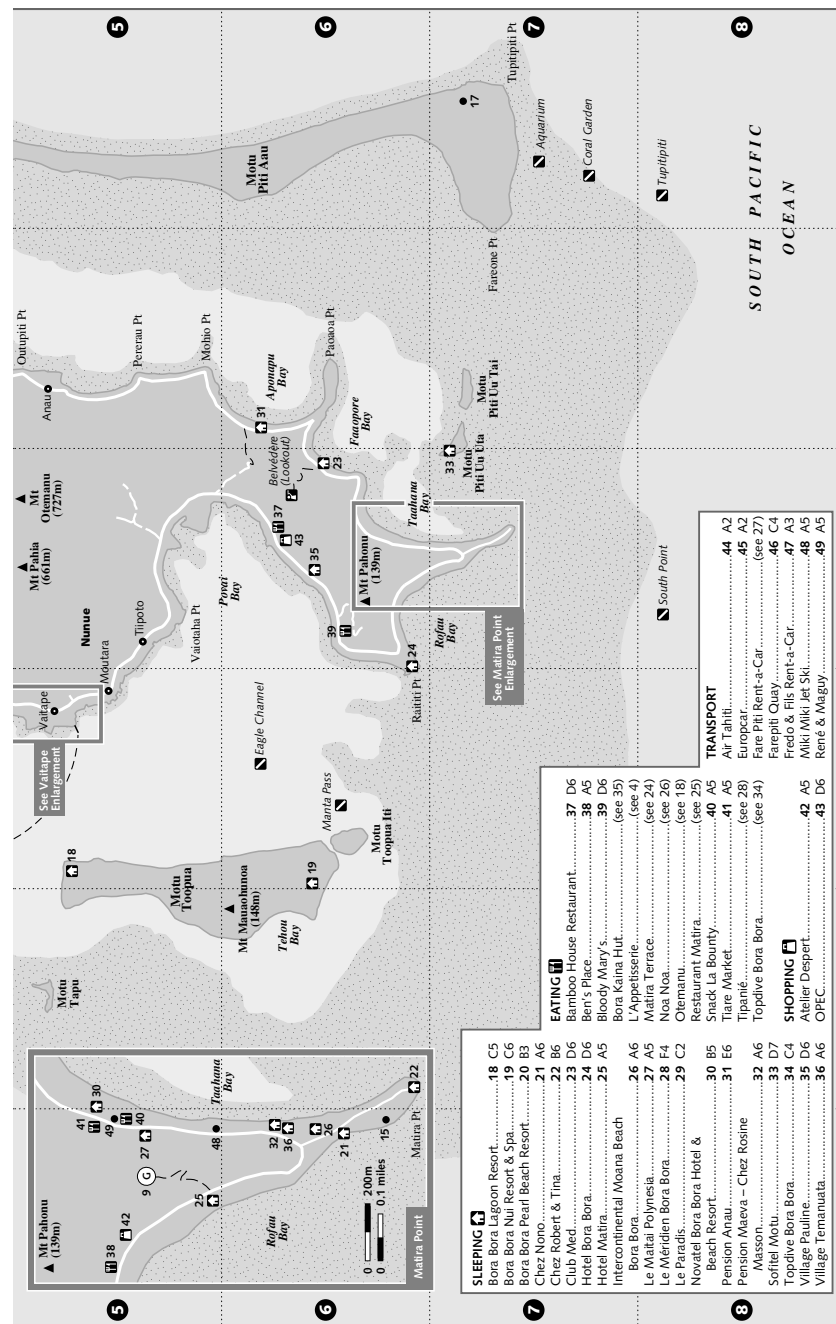
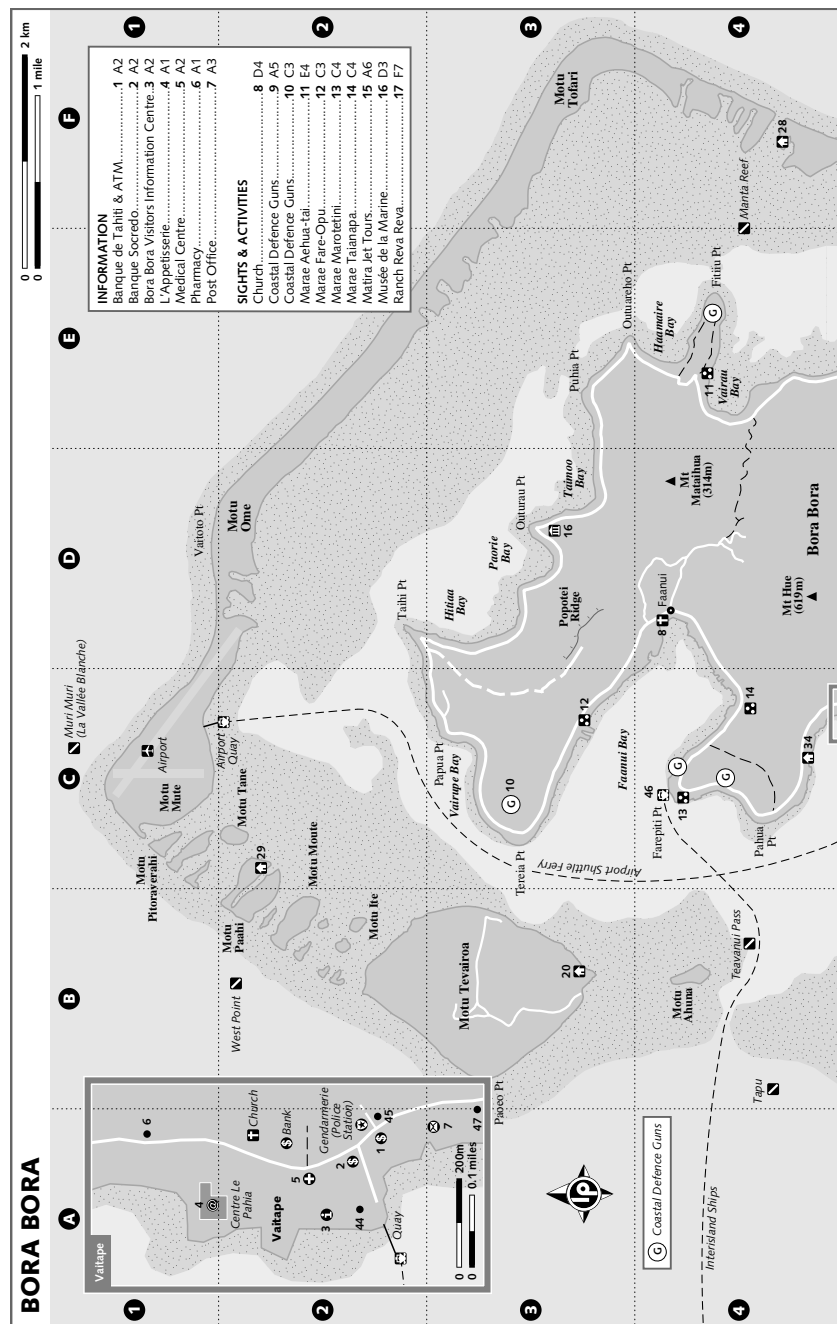
Numerous flights head to Bora Bora on a daily basis.

Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti (☎ 67 70 35; Vaitape; 🕒 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) flies between Bora Bora and Tahiti (from 14,000 CFP, six daily), Huahine (from 7500 CFP, daily), Mo'orea (from 18,000 CFP, daily) and Ra'iatea (from 6500 CFP, daily). Air Tahiti also has direct flights from Bora Bora to the Tuamotus, with a very handy flight to Rangiroa (from 23,000 CFP, daily) and an onward connection to Manihi (from 26,000 CFP, twice weekly). Flights operate to Rangiroa daily, but only twice a week in the reverse direction.

Flying into Bora Bora, the left side of the aircraft offers the best views of the spectacular scenery.

Inter-island boats dock at the Farepiti quay, 3km north of Vaitape. The cargo ship **Vaeau** (☎ 41 25 35) makes three trips a week between Pape'ete and Bora Bora. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.



The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) runs between Bora Bora and Maupiti (2500 CFP, three times weekly) and Ra'iatea/Taha'a (2500 CFP, four times weekly). The boat departs the Vaitape quay for Maupiti at 8.30am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the return trip leaves Maupiti at 4pm the same day. The boat departs for Ra'iatea and Taha'a at 7am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 4pm on Sunday.

Getting Around

Arriving on Bora Bora is quite dramatic. The airport is on Motu Mute at the northern edge of the lagoon; two large catamaran ferries then transfer you to the Vaitape quay (free). A regular bus service from the quay goes to the hotels at Matira Point (500 CFP).

You need to be at the quay at least 1½ hours before your flight leaves. The top hotels transfer their guests directly to/from the airport, other places collect you at the quay.

There is no real public transport on Bora Bora. Car-hire agencies include: **Europcar** (☎ 67 70 15), with an agency opposite the quay in central Vaitape plus desks in several hotels; **Fredo & Fils Rent-a-Car** (☎ 67 70 31), in Vaitape and at several hotels; and **Fare Piti Rent-a-Car** (☎ 67 65 28), in Le Maitai Polynesia. Rates are around 8500 CFP for eight hours and 10,000 CFP for 24 hours.

Bora Bora's back roads cry out for a mountain bike but you're unlikely to be able to hire one. You will find basic bikes for rent at Europcar, Fredo and Fare Piti, and at many hotels. Fare Piti rents scooters.

Hiring a boat is a heavenly way to explore the lagoon. **René & Maguy** (☎ 67 60 61), next to Snack La Bounty at Matira Point, hires outboard-powered boats. **Miki Miki Jet Ski** (☎ 67 76 44), shortly after Les Maitai Polynesia from Vaitape, hires jet skis for 15,000 CFP for two hours.

SIGHTS

Bora Bora's 32km coast road hugs the shoreline almost all the way around the island and is dotted with *marae* and WWII remnants. We describe an anticlockwise tour that starts in Vaitape; as it's flat except for the decent hill around Fitiu Point it makes a good bicycle ride.

At PK6, Hotel Bora Bora at Raititi Point marks the start of the pleasant sandy stretch of **Matira Beach**. From the eastern edge of

the Hotel Matira property a walking trail (10 minutes) runs up the hill to a battery of WWII **coastal defence guns**.

The Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora Resort is on a side road that runs out to **Matira Point** and a great public beach. The annual Hawaiki Nui inter-island canoe race ends on this beach. Club Med (PK9) has its own **belvédère** atop the ridge above the bay.

At Fitiu Point (PK15) the road climbs briefly away from the coast. Just as the road starts to climb, a track peels off to **Marae Aehua-tai** at the water's edge.

The small, private **Musée de la Marine** (Marine Museum; ☎ 67 75 24; admission by donation; ☎ call for hrs) has an interesting collection of model ships. Just after **Taihi Point** a steep and often-muddy track climbs to a WWII radar station atop Popotei Ridge and on to a lookout above the village of Faanui.

At the end of Tereia Point a rectangular concrete water tank marks the position of another **coastal gun**. There's no path: just clamber straight up the hill for a couple of minutes. **Marae Fare-Opu** is squeezed between the road and water's edge. Two of the slabs are clearly marked with turtle petroglyphs.

Faanui Bay was the site of the main US military base during WWII and there is still much evidence of the wartime operations there. From the picturesque **church** at the head of the bay an often-muddy road runs directly inland and over the ridge to drop into Vairau Bay just south of Fitiu Point.

Marae Taianapa (PK28) is a fairly large *marae* on the inland side of the road located past Faanui village.

Marae Marotetini, a fine 50m-long royal *marae*, is just beyond the quay.

ACTIVITIES

Quite a few of the hotels and guesthouses offer lagoon tours that include snorkelling, reef walking, a *motu* barbecue and both swimming and snorkelling stops; they cost approximately 5000/7500 CFP for a half/full day.

Diving & Snorkelling

Sharks, rays and other marine life abound in Bora Bora, making diving a very popular activity. **Anau**, with its visits by black-tip reef sharks and manta rays, is one of the most popular lagoon sites. **Motu Toopua** and

Motu Toopua Iti are magnificent lagoon dives. Outside the reef, to the north, **Muri Muri** (La Vallée Blanche) is known for sharks. Single-tank dives cost around 6500 CFP, and most places also offer introductory dives for around 7000 CFP. **Topdive Bora Bora** (☎ 60 50 50; www.topdive.com) and **Bora Bora Blue Nui** (☎ 67 79 07; www.bluenui.com), based at the Bora Bora Pearl Resort, are just two of many good dive shops.

Matira Point is the best stretch of **beach** on the main island; many *motu* have superb sand but ask permission before exploring them. The marine reserve off Hotel Bora Bora (p636) has excellent snorkelling.

Horse Riding

Ranch Reva Reva (☎ 67 63 63; trips from 4000 CFP; ☎ 8am-4pm) offers horse-riding excursions for all levels on Motu Piti Aau. The typical beach ride lasts about an hour, but the company's best adventure is its 2½-hour moonlight ride (8500 CFP) that departs nightly at 8pm. Transfers included.

Jet-Skiing

For a crazy adrenalin rush, you can't beat the two-hour jet-ski tours run by **Matira Jet Tours** (☎ 67 62 73; www.boraborawaverunner.com; ☎ tours depart 10am & 2pm). Trips cost US\$150 for two people. The company also offers two-hour combination jet-ski and ATV tours for US\$180 for two people.

Walking

Bora Bora offers plenty of good walking; a guide is recommended. Allow at least five hours (return) for the tough but rewarding ascent of **Mt Pahia** (661m).

SLEEPING

You could easily whittle away your life savings on deluxe hotels on Bora Bora, which are as sumptuous as the hype leads you to believe. However, you can also benefit from staying at cheaper *pensions* and even camping. Most accommodation is on the southern coast.

West Coast

There are a few fine places to stay dotted along the west coast.

Village Pauline (☎ 67 72 16; vpauline@38mail.pf; camping per person 2500 CFP, dm 3500 CFP, bungalows 7500-13,000 CFP) Backpackers will appreciate

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Topdive Bora Bora (☎ 60 50 50; www.topdive.com; garden/over-water bungalows 40,000/50,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) Travellers rave about the friendly, personalised service at this small resort catering to divers. Set amid lush communal areas, the standout bungalows feature cathedral ceilings, palm-thatched roofs and marble floors. There's no beach, but the lagoon-facing swimming pool is fabulous enough to compensate for any lack of sand. Book well in advance.

this beautifully maintained place in a Polynesian-style village amid a tropical garden. Dorms are a simple but solid option, and the most expensive bungalow rivals those at the top hotels for a fraction of the price. Transfers from Vaitape quay cost 300 CFP.

Matira Point

With the best beach on Bora Bora, Matira Point is packed with accommodation.

BUDGET

They may lack the luxury of the top hotels, but there are a number of little *pensions* around Matira Point that lay claim to the best sweep of beach on the main island.

Chez Nono (☎ 67 71 38; nono.leverd@mail.pf; r 7500 CFP, bungalows 10,000-13,000 CFP) If you can secure the big bungalow, then this place is fantastic value: the spacious and breezy affair features giant windows, high-quality linens and comfortable beds. The smaller bungalows are less plush, though still adequate. The rooms are tiny, hot and overpriced, but Chez Nono's fabulous location, on Bora Bora's best beach, makes it hard to resist.

Pension Maeva – Chez Rosine Masson (☎ 67 72 04; dm/r 3500/7500 CFP) Right on the water's edge, this *pension* has loads of charm and character. The house creaks and the walls are paper thin, but the lagoonside setting is a delight. There's a shared lounge room, kitchen and two bathrooms (one with hot water). Transfers from Vaitape cost 500 CFP.

Chez Robert & Tina (☎ 67 63 55; r 8000 CFP) Get a room with a lovely balcony overlooking the sea at this often fully booked place in a tranquil location. Rooms are in simple,

whitewashed, fan-cooled homes right on the point. A lowlight is the lack of beach access. Transfers from Vaitape cost 500 CFP.

MIDRANGE

As you saunter into the midrange category, you can safely expect private bathrooms with hot water.

Novatel Bora Bora Hotel & Beach Resort (☎ 60 59 50; www.accorhotels.com; r from 13,000 CFP; ☞ ☑) This place receives favourable value-for-money reviews. The site is slightly cramped, but the pool will blow you away – a dazzling and hip mirage that melts into the sea. Digs are in 80 modern rooms, four of which have disabled access.

Village Temanuata (☎ 67 75 61; www.temanuata.com; bungalows from 14,000 CFP) Features a variety of local-style bungalows with lots of Tahitian wall art. Skip the 'superior bungalows', they're not worth the extra price. Look for Temanuata just after the Matira Point turn-off and the Intercontinental. Book ahead, it's popular.

Hotel Matira (☎ 67 78 58; bungalows 22,000-40,000 CFP) Offers simple, spacious and tastefully decorated thatched-roof bungalows on the beach. The service is friendly and helpful and the place has a fabulous restaurant. Half board adds 5000 CFP per person, while full board costs an additional 8000 CFP. Return transfers from Vaitape cost 1500 CFP per person.

TOP END

Intercontinental Moana Beach Bora Bora (☎ 60 49 00; www.borabora.interconti.com; bungalows from 70,000 CFP; ☞ ☑ ☑) A jet-set favourite and one of Bora Bora's most lush delights, the over-water bungalows here exude romance: vanilla plants in the bathroom perfume the air, a glass window in the floor reveals a myriad of tropical fish swimming in the crystal-clear lagoon below. The outdoor areas, tropical jungles great for wandering, are as dreamy as they are perfect. Ideal for the honeymoon.

Hotel Bora Bora (☎ 60 44 60; www.amanresorts.com; bungalows from 75,000 CFP; ☞ ☑ ☑) Consistently regarded as one of the best hotels in the world, the Hotel Bora Bora has long been the domain of the rich and famous – Pierce Brosnan is a regular. Exuding the most gracious and exotic kind of South Pacific charm, this masterpiece rules Bora's

best real estate, but manages to be incredibly luxurious without feeling ostentatious.

Le Maitai Polynésie (☎ 60 30 00; www.hotelmaitai.com; r/bungalows from 30,000/45,500 CFP; ☞ ☑) It's not as isolated or glamorous as its competitors, but this sprawling resort offers slightly lower prices without compromising too much in the luxury department. Rooms are comfortable and modern; the over-water bungalows feature token glass windows cut into the floor.

East Coast

The east coast is less built-up than the rest of the island, with only a few places to choose from here.

Club Med (☎ 60 46 04; www.clubmed.com; 2-person all inclusive packages from US\$375; ☞ ☑) Sure it feels a little cheesy, but this is one of the best deals on Bora Bora (book over the Internet). Club Med doesn't have the all out luxurious finesse of Bora's ritziest resorts, but it's hardly shabby. On a fine stretch of private beach, the bungalows are spacious with fabulous bathrooms. Rates include meals and all the booze you can drink (and not just the cheap stuff) as well as evening shows, *motu* excursions and snorkelling trips. Skip the paid excursions, it's cheaper to organise them on your own.

Pension Anau (☎ 67 78 17; fax 67 73 24; s/d bungalows 7000/9500 CFP) One of the best budget places on the island, the bungalows here are well equipped with big bathrooms and kitchen facilities. Free transfers from the Vaitape quay are offered, and bikes are available. There's no beach, but there's a nice decked area.

The Motu

Staying on a *motu* ensures unrivalled tranquillity, a complete escape and great views of Bora Bora.

Le Paradis (☎ 67 75 53; bungalows from 13,000 CFP) On Motu Paahi is this perfectly affordable *motu pension* (well, affordable for a *motu* on Bora Bora) with a relaxed atmosphere. There are five simple bungalows in a lagoonside coconut plantation. Airport transfers are free; transport to Vaitape costs 1000 CFP per person. Credit cards are not accepted.

Bora Bora Lagoon Resort (☎ 60 40 00; www.boralagoonresort.com; bungalows from 60,000 CFP; ☞ ☑) Another award winner, Bora Bora Lagoon gets consistently high marks from

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa (☎ 60 33 00; www.boraboranui.com; bungalows 75,000-300,000 CFP; ☞ ☑ ☑) Destined to become a hot new favourite, this recently opened resort on Motu Toopua oozes swanky charm. Bungalows are unusually spacious, with slick features such as Italian marble bathrooms and Indonesian canopy beds. Over-water bungalows feature the token glass-floor viewing panel. The spa is perched on a lava hill overlooking the resort; it offers the usual pampering with extraordinary 360-degree panoramic views.

returning travellers. It has an idyllic and secluded feel (although with more than 75 bungalows it isn't exactly small). A shuttle runs between the resort and the main island (from just in front of the tourist office) every half-hour from 8am to midnight.

Bora Bora Pearl Beach Resort (☎ 60 52 00; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows from 55,000 CFP; ☞ ☑ ☑) With a magnificent swimming pool and over-water restaurant, this sexy resort on Motu Tevairoa boasts a variety of luxurious bungalows constructed from natural materials – including some special over-water ones. Traditional dance performances are generally held three times weekly. Add an extra 7500/10,000 CFP for half/full board. There's a shuttle to the mainland every 45 minutes between 8.15am and 10pm.

Le Méridien Bora Bora (☎ 60 51 51; www.lemeridien-borabora.com; bungalows from 70,000 CFP; ☞ ☑ ☑) On the eastern side of the lagoon, this place almost defies description. The glass floors in the over-water bungalows are mesmerising, the boat-shaped bar fabulous and the hotel is involved in sea-turtle protection work, so guests have the bonus of watching the rehabilitating turtles. There's a shuttle boat to and from Anau on the main island from 8am to midnight.

Sofitel Motu (☎ 60 56 00; www.sofitel.com; bungalows from 75,000 CFP; ☞ ☑) On tiny Motu Piti Uu Uta, this quiet retreat has environmentally pleasing Polynesian-style bungalows perched on a hillside and scattered among the coconut trees. You can choose from beach or over-water digs, there's a restaurant with a panoramic view, a sunset bar and regular shuttle boats to the mainland.

EATING

Most restaurants firmly shut the door at 9pm, so don't wait until then or you may go hungry. Nearly all the independent restaurants (excluding snack places) as well as some of the resort restaurants offer free transport to and from your hotel.

All of the luxury hotels have dance performances with buffet dinners several times a week. Expect to pay around 7500 to 9000 CFP.

West Coast

Vaitape has a few good places for breakfast, a snack or a cheap meal. There's a string of stalls along the main road that sell sandwiches and cool drinks. In the evening several *roulottes* (dishes 1000-1500 CFP) take up position along the main road and serve simple dishes.

Bloody Mary's (☎ 67 72 86; appetisers 1200-1500 CFP, mains 2500-2800 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner) Bloody Mary's is a Bora Bora institution and deserves to be visited on that merit alone. OK, so the food – fresh fish, seafood and meat cooked American barbecue style – is not always consistently excellent, but the ambience is unbeatable. Coconut-tree stools, coloured lights, a thatched roof and a floor of sand all heighten the beach bum appeal. Free transport is provided from anywhere between Vaitape and Club Med during dinner hours.

Bora Kaina Hut (☎ 67 72 16; dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner) Travellers rave about the food at this funky restaurant serving global cuisine inside Village Pauline. The Saturday night Pacific buffet (a feast of grilled meats, fish and local fruits and vegetables) includes live music and dance performances.

Topdive Bora Bora (☎ 60 50 50; dishes 2000-3600 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner) Fabulous cathedral ceilings, stylish décor and an outdoor terrace overlooking the lagoon make this restaurant at the hotel by the same name a good place to grab a meal. The menu is French and Polynesian; transport is offered.

Bamboo House Restaurant (☎ 67 76 24; dishes 1200-5500 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The long-standing Bamboo House is a fairly unpretentious joint constructed entirely from local bamboo. The French cuisine gets consistently good reviews and the snack menu at lunch is reasonably priced. The restaurant provides free transport.

L'Appetisserie (☎ 67 78 88; pastries 130-400 CFP, toasted sandwiches 500-900 CFP; ☒ breakfast & lunch; ☑) The most sophisticated place in town for breakfast or a snack, it serves excellent coffee along with a delicious range of fresh baked pastries and light sandwiches. This is also the place to check your email.

Matira Point & Around

Noa Noa (☎ 60 49 00; breakfast buffet 2500 CFP, dishes 1500-3000 CFP; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Noa Noa at the Intercontinental Moana Beach has an especially attractive setting right on the beach and a reputation for excellent food. At lunch there are loads of nongreasy salads and sandwiches to choose from. The resort's dinner and dance performance (around 9000 CFP) is well respected.

Matira Terrace (☎ 60 44 60; dishes 1500-6000 CFP; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This highly regarded restaurant in the Hotel Bora Bora offers excellent international cuisine with an emphasis on French and Polynesian, along with professional service and a romantic, open-air setting. The attached bar serves frothy tropical cocktails and light meals at funky wooden tables under a thatched roof.

Ben's Place (☎ 67 74 54; dishes 300-2000 CFP; ☒ breakfast & lunch) A local and tourist favourite for decades, this ramshackle beach shack across from the water is as popular for its energetic ambience as it is for its varied home-cooked meals. The menu features everything from spicy *poisson cru* to fajitas, pizza, pasta and eggy breakfast options.

Snack La Bounty (☎ 67 70 43; dishes 800-2500 CFP; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Funky little Snack La Bounty is festively decorated with loads

of bright yellow lights and dense foliage in an open-air thatched-roof building. It's popular for its tasty thin-crust pizzas, delicious pastas and house specialities such as *mahimahi* with vanilla sauce and raspberry vinegar.

Restaurant Matira (☎ 67 70 51; dishes 1200-2000 CFP; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Part of the Hotel Matira, this restaurant emits a breezy, unpretentious vibe with worn wooden tables, creaky floorboards and big plate-glass windows looking out onto the sea. The menu has loads of Chinese dishes along with a few lighter snack options. If you're on a budget order a burger and fries, a steal at 600 CFP. Free transport is offered anywhere between Hotel Bora Bora and Anau.

Tiare Market (☎ 6.30am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 6.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Sun) Across from the Novatel Bora Bora is a well-stocked supermarket.

The Motu

Free shuttles, which generally operate until midnight, allow you to enjoy the restaurants at the luxury *motu* hotels. It's best to reserve.

Tipanié (☎ 60 51 51; dishes from 2000 CFP; ☒ lunch & dinner) In Le Méridien Bora Bora, this is a superb surfboard-shaped restaurant right by the lagoon – the views are fabulous. There's a different set menu each night or you can choose from a variety of French and Tahitian à la carte offerings. The shuttle operates from the Anau quay.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Dinner and a show in one of the big hotels is about the limit of nightlife on Bora Bora; make the most of the daytime activities and have an early night.

Any of the luxury hotels will provide a cold beer or cocktail and a pleasant snack by the lagoon. The *motu* hotels run free shuttles until about midnight. The bar at Bloody Mary's (p637) is popular.

Don't miss a traditional dance performance by a local group in one of the luxury hotels. Some places allow you in for the price of a drink at the bar; others charge up to 2000 CFP entry. For 6500 CFP to 10,000 CFP you can combine the performance with a sumptuous buffet dinner. Performances take place two or three times weekly.

SHOPPING

Shopping on Bora Bora tends to mean gallery hopping, buying (or dreaming about buying) pearls, wrapping yourself in various brightly coloured *pareu* or perhaps getting a traditional Marquesan-designed tattoo.

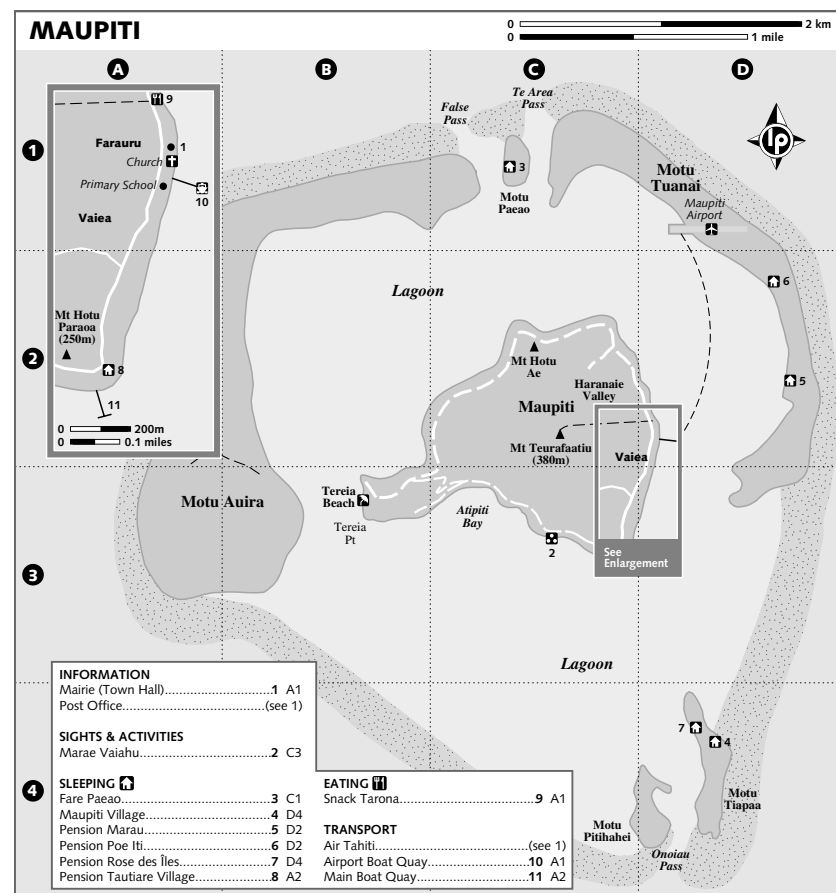
Atelier Despert (☎ 60 48 15; www.despert.com) Even if you can't afford to purchase the original paintings, it's worth stopping by this lovely little studio at Matira Point to chat with the charming artist and check out his latest pieces. Alain Despert only does originals (no prints), and his work has gained worldwide recognition for its bold and bright patterns.

Office Polynésien d'Expertise et de Commercialisation (OPEC; ☎ 67 61 62) An impeccably run

rare-pearl company, this is the only place that puts your pearl in a machine so you can see its quality. If you're serious about purchasing fine pearls, stop here first, if only for a quick lesson on cultured pearls.

MAUPITI

The smallest and most isolated of the Society Islands, Maupiti is an unblemished tropical playground where tranquillity trumps everything else and romantic stories of deserted sparkling white-sand *motu* surrounded by shimmering aqua lagoons come alive. Serving up a Robinson Crusoe version of paradise, Maupiti seduces lovers



THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Otemanu (☎ 60 40 02; dishes from 2500 CFP; ☒ lunch & dinner) Perhaps the most romantic restaurant on the island, Otemanu, in the Bora Bora Lagoon Resort, defies superlatives. You can sample a fine bottle of wine at a table overlooking the lagoon, and enjoy a wonderful candlelit dinner as you watch the sunset over Bora Bora's most sacred peak. The gourmet cuisine is fresh and exquisitely presented, the service polite and professional. There are shuttles from the Vaitape quay.

and adventurers on a quest for the heavenly, erotic Polynesia of lore. It's not for everyone, however. If you're searching for beauty in its most basic form, void of luxury trappings and the crowds they attract, you'll definitely dig this island's slow-motion ambience. But if your idea of a great holiday includes plush digs, decadent restaurants, slick boutiques or even just a few rowdy bars, Maupiti's not for you. Accommodation is in *pensions*, places meant for sleeping and little else: think watching the sun set over the lagoon from the comfort of your slightly saggy mattress. While hardly glitzy, these family-run places usually boast loads of old-fashioned hospitality, gracious charm and stunning *motu* locales.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

A 10km road circles the island. The string of buildings along the southeast coast technically constitutes two villages, Farauru and Vaiea, though they're difficult to separate. The church in the middle of the village strip is the most notable landmark. The *mairie*, post office and Air Tahiti office are in one neat little group immediately north of the church.

TRANSPORT

There is no public transport on Maupiti, and most folks reserve their *pension* and transport from the airport in advance.

Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti flies from Maupiti to Tahiti (from 14,500 CFP, five weekly) and Ra'iata (from 6500 CFP, three weekly). The **Air Tahiti office** (☎ 67 80 20; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Thu, 9.30am-11am Fri) is in the village beside the *mairie* (town hall).

The **Maupiti Express** (☎ 67 66 69) runs between Maupiti and Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for 2500/3500 CFP one way/return. Departing Vaitape (Bora Bora) at 8.30am, it arrives at Maupiti at 10.15am, then departs for the return trip at 4pm and arrives at Bora Bora at 5.45pm.

Getting Around

If you've booked accommodation you'll be met at the airport, although some places charge for the trip. Otherwise, there's a boat that takes Air Tahiti staff and any hangers-on to the main island after the flight has

IMPORTANT! READ THIS...

Maupiti has no banks or ATMs, and none of the island's sleeping options take credit cards or even travellers cheques, so it's imperative you bring enough cash with you to pay for your entire stay; plan ahead, as most banks have a limit on how much cash you can get out of the ATM in one day. Half board usually includes free water, coffee and tea, but rarely beer and soft drinks. Although beer is usually available, remember each one will probably cost around 400 CFP, so budget in some extra cash if you're planning to imbibe.

arrived. The one-way fare for the 15-minute trip is 400 CFP (children 200 CFP). The Air Tahiti boat also goes out to the airport *motu* for departing flights. Boat departure times, usually one to 1½ hours prior to flights, are posted at the Air Tahiti office.

It's relatively simple to arrange a boat out to the *motu* from the villages and vice versa. It costs between 500 and 1000 CFP to go from the main island to the *motu* and between 2000 and 5000 CFP for a lagoon excursion. Every *pension* on the mainland or *motu* can arrange these transfers.

SIGHTS

Maupiti's star attractions are its five idyllic *motu*: spits of sand and crushed coral dotted with swaying palms and floating in the jade lagoon that surrounds the main island. Most travellers choose to stay on these fabulous islets, but if you don't the mainland *pensions* will happily organise day trips for around 2000 CFP per person. Besides acting as quiet retreats (perfect for sunbathing, swimming or simply reading a trashy novel), the *motu* also boast Maupiti's best beaches. **Motu Paeao**, at the northern end of the lagoon, is the site of an important archaeological discovery: a series of thousand-year-old burial sites. The lagoon drops off quickly here, so it's also good for swimming. At low tide you can reach **Motu Auira** from the mainland by wading across the lagoon; the water is warm and only waist high, but keep an eye out for rays. **Motu Tiapaa** has beautiful sandy white beaches and good snorkelling on either its ocean or lagoon side. It also is the most

developed *motu*, with four *pensions*. If you have a kayak you can paddle across to the completely isolated **Motu Pitihahei**, but steer way to the north of Onoia Pass, which is very dangerous. The airport and a few *pensions* are found on **Motu Tuanai**, which also has decent kite-boarding and surf spots.

You can walk around the island in just a few hours. The west coast, from Pohiva Point to Puoroo and Tereia Points, is dotted with **coastal marae**. On this coast, **Tereia Beach** is the finest on the island for white sand and swimming. It's easy to walk across the lagoon to Motu Auira, particularly at low tide.

In Atipiti Bay on the south side of the island, just northeast of the main quay, is the area known as Tefarearii, the 'House of Kings'. The island's nobility once lived here and **Marae Vaiahu** is a large coastal site.

ACTIVITIES

Snorkelling

Snorkelling is particularly good in the area south of Onoia Pass, but make sure you don't get too close to the pass itself (you'll start to notice the current getting stronger; when it does it's time to head towards shore). The *pensions* will organise lagoon tours with snorkelling stops (2000 to 5000 CFP) and most also offer free snorkels and masks if you want to explore on your own.

Walking

Maupiti has some good walking, including the one-hour clamber up **Mt Motu Paraoa** (250m), which looms high above the villages; the track is unmarked, so take a guide (about 2000 CFP per person; ask at your *pension*). It's a superb climb to the summit of **Mt Teurafaatiu** (380m), the island's highest point. Allow three hours for the return trip. The walk starts from the high point where the road crosses the ridge above Tereia Point and generally sticks to the ridgeline.

SLEEPING & EATING

The *motu* are by far the best places to sleep. Not only are the guesthouses a bit more sophisticated, but you also get to laze on Maupiti's best beaches and wade into its most beautiful water. The villages will appeal to those looking for a cultural, rather than beach, experience. Most people opt for half or full board at their accommodation;

if you're staying on the *motu* this will likely be your only option. Several small village shops sell basic supplies.

Pension Rose des Îles (☎ /fax 67 82 00; bungalows with half board per person from 10,000 CFP) It's worth staying here for the food alone – think lobster feasts and fine French cooking. In a lovely location on the lagoon side of Motu Tiapaa, it offers two simple but charming bungalows made from woven palm fronds. The mattresses are a little lumpy, but the French hostess makes such an effort it's hard to get upset.

Pension Marau (☎ 70 56 09; www.pension-marau.com; bungalows 6000 CFP) Surfers and backpackers will dig the ultrachill atmosphere at this oceanside guesthouse on Motu Tuanai. The young owner is happy to teach you how to surf or kite board – he won't charge for his time, just the fuel to get there. Bungalows are spacious with breezy porches and large bathrooms.

Maupiti Village (☎ 67 80 08; dm/r/bungalows with full board per person 5500/6500/8000 CFP) This beautiful property on Motu Tiapaa is by no means ritzy but offers the best-value budget accommodation in Maupiti. Digs are in small, basic bungalows, matchbox-sized rooms or a six-bed dorm. Airport/village transfers are 1800/1300 CFP per person return.

Fare Paeao (☎ 76 81 01; d/tr bungalows 10,600/12,100 CFP) The only *pension* on Motu Paeao; come here for total isolation. The location is exceptional with great swimming spots. The six bungalows, while hardly posh, are clean and comfortable and feature huge glass windows, lovely terraces and electric antimosquito devices. There are free kayaks and an on-site café serves a mean rum punch. Airport transfers are 1100 CFP per person return.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pension Poe Iti (☎ 74 58 76; maupitiexpress@mail.pf; bungalows 7000 CFP; ☎) The swankiest place in Maupiti is also the best value. The brand-new bungalows are very spacious and come with TVs, DVD players and fridges. The location, on a small strip of beach on Motu Tuanai, offers blue-green lagoon vistas amid rows of swaying palms. Airport transfers, kayaks and snorkels are available free.

Pension Tautiare Village (☎ 67 83 58; www.tautiarevillage.com; r with breakfast/half/full board per person 5500/7000/8500 CFP) With colourful bedspreads, grassy garden areas and a lovely location against the mountains, this is the best guesthouse on the mainland. Rooms are spotless, the service personal and the ambience intimate. The only drawback is it's a 1.5km walk from the nearest beach. Airport transfers are 1700 CFP.

Snack Tarona (☎ 67 82 46; dishes 900-1200 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place, to the north of the villages, serves simple dishes in bland environs.

TUAMOTU ISLANDS

Strung like white-sand jewels across the Pacific, the Tuamotus (too-ah-moh-toos) are a world apart. These rings of coral are the posthumous witnesses to what was once, according to Darwin's theory of atoll formation, an archipelago of high islands as mountainous and grand as perhaps the Marquesas or Society Islands are today. The 77 atolls, scattered like confetti on an ocean of ink, stretch 1500km northwest to southeast and 500km east to west. The closest islands are about 300km from Tahiti.

The Tuamotus have always been a dangerous place for navigators and they long remained in the shadow of the Society Islands. That has changed thanks to pearl cultivation, which has become a central pillar of the Polynesian economy. The growth of pearl cultivation has reversed the outward migration of the population, which has grown from 11,793 to 15,846 people since 1983. There are 45 inhabited islands, ranging from those with a mere handful of transient occupants to Rangiroa, with a total population of 3016. With this economic development and increase in population, infrastructure has been dramatically improved.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The archipelago is accessible by plane; 29 atolls have airstrips and are served by Air Tahiti. Most of the traffic is to and from Pape'ete, but there are also connections with Bora Bora, the Marquesas and the Gambier Archipelago. Within the archipelago, Rangiroa and Hao are the principal flight hubs.

If you're visiting an island, always give the Air Tahiti representative a contact address or phone number, as schedules are subject to change.

The *Dory*, *Corbia*, *Mareva Nui*, *Taporo V* and *VI*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Kura Ora II* and *III*, *Hotu Maru*, *Vai-Aito*, *Nuku Hau* and *Aranui* all serve the archipelago from Pape'ete and most take passengers. For more on travelling by cargo ship see p676.

GETTING AROUND

Outboard motorboat is the most common method of transport in the Tuamotus. Road networks are often just crushed-coral or sand tracks, perhaps a few kilometres long, linking the village to the airport or to the areas where copra is produced. Public transport usually does not exist. Ask at your hotel or *pension* about transport as they will usually be able to set you up with whatever you need.

Airports are sometimes near the villages, sometimes on remote *motu* on the other side of the lagoon. If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will come and meet you but transfers are not necessarily free. If there is a charge it will depend on the distance travelled and the means of transport. Hitching (by car or boat) is possible as many islanders go to the airports for arrivals and departures, although there may not be room for you by the time all the freight is loaded! If you do get given a ride, offer to help pay for petrol as it is quite expensive.

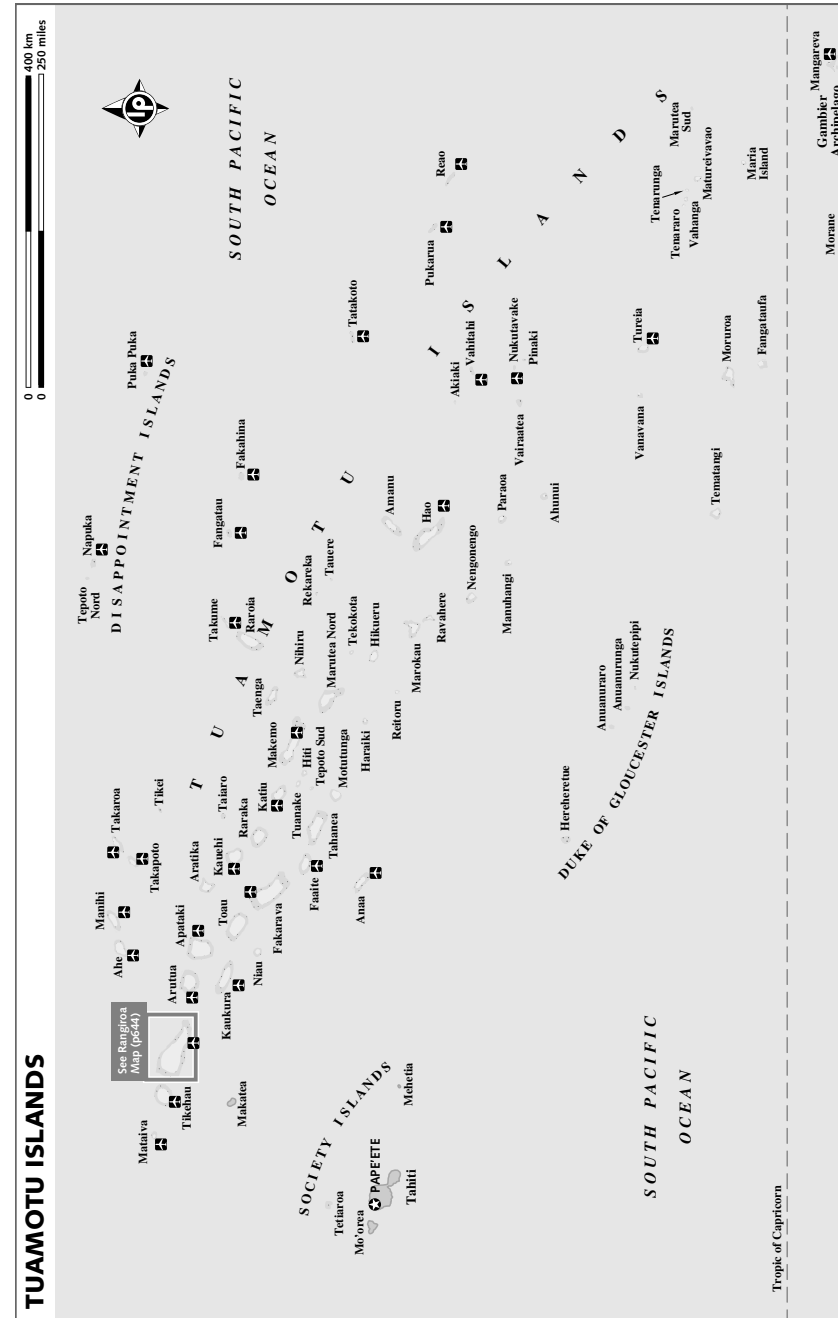
Bicycles and scooters are often used in the villages; some *pensions* rent them out or they can be hired from islanders.

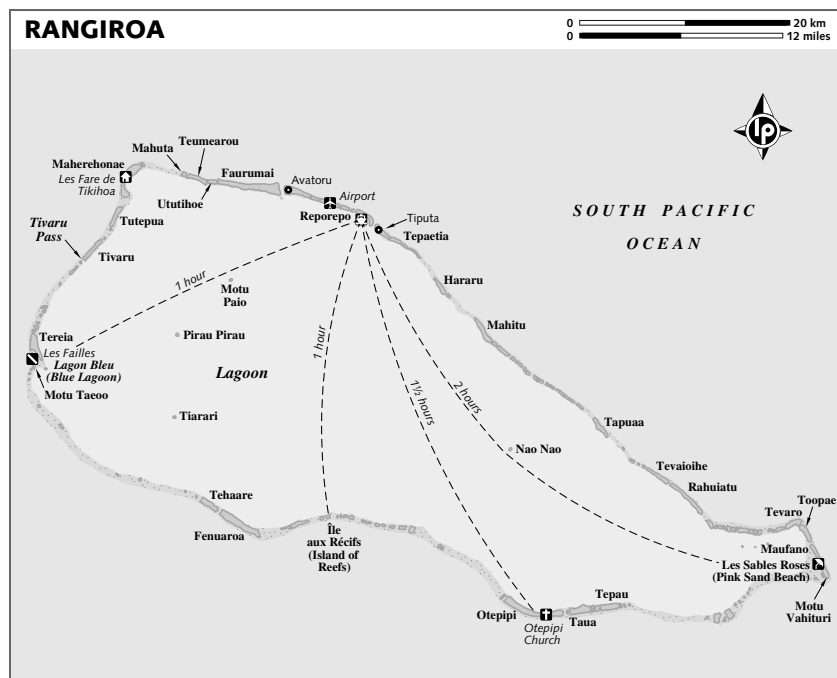
RANGIROA

pop 3016 / lagoon area 1640 sq km

Rangiroa (rung-ee-roh-ah) takes a silver medal for being the second-biggest atoll in the world, but comes with a gold medal as far as wonderfully languorous, remote places to explore go – although don't expect the kind of high style you'd find on Bora Bora.

Diving attracts the majority of visitors to Rangiroa, but there's something for everyone. From wine tasting at one of the world's most unusual wineries and exploring the vast lagoon to just lying on the beach, Rangi, as it is affectionately known by the locals, has justly earned its reputation as the tourist centre of the Tuamotus.





A series of large swells has menaced the atoll's lagoon over the last several years and many white-sand beaches have been reduced to gravel-sand beaches. Even so, the stark whiteness of the bleached coral against the turquoise lagoon creates a bright, nearly Grecian cocktail for the eyes. Life in the lagoon has sprung back from much of the damage and is as blue and inviting as ever.

Rangiroa (from 'Rairoa', literally 'long space') is home to more than 10% of the total population of the Tuamotus.

Information

Centre Médical Avatoru (☎ 96 03 75) East of Avatoru.

Le Kai Kai Restaurant (☎ 96 03 39; Tevaiohe; per hr 1500 CFP) Internet access.

Pharmacie de Rangiroa (☎ 93 12 30; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm Sun) In Avatoru centre near the Catholic church.

Post offices In Avatoru and Tiputa.

Sights

AVATORU & TIPUTA

Somniferous as it may be, Avatoru is modern and bustling by Tuamotu standards.

There is a post office, a few banks and a supermarket with hopeless opening hours (but a decent selection of groceries). There are two churches, one Catholic and one Mormon, and a few little places to eat. A small site overlooking Tiputa Pass has been cleared so that visitors can watch the daily performances of dolphins that dance in the waves created by the outgoing current.

To visit a pearl farm, try **Gauguin's Pearl** (☎ 96 05 39), about 1km west of the airport, or the small operations run by Pension Martine – contact **L'Atelier Corinne** (☎ 96 03 13), opposite the guesthouse – and **Heipoe Ura** (☎ 96 04 35).

Around the middle of the day, you could pretty safely fire a gun along the main street in Tiputa and not hit anyone. It's a charming little village, and there are fewer *popaa* here.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Lagon Bleu (Blue Lagoon) is one hour away by boat on the western edge of the atoll, close to Motu Taeoo. A string of *motu* and coral reefs have formed a beautiful natural

pool on the edge of the main reef, a lagoon within a lagoon. Less touristy **Lagon Vert** (Green Lagoon) is only five minutes from Avatoru by boat.

The magnificent **Les Sables Roses** (Pink Sand Beach) is on the southeast edge of Rangiroa's lagoon near Motu Vahituri, 1½ to two hours from Avatoru by boat. Trips are expensive but worth it.

On the south side of the atoll, an hour by boat from Avatoru, **Île aux Récifs** (Reef Island), also known as Motu Ai Ai, lies in water dotted with *feo* (coral outcrops) that have weathered into strange petrified silhouettes; it's a great day trip.

Organised tours tend to be the best way to see the sights, though they rely on the weather and the number of takers. Lagoon and *motu* trips typically cost 7500 to 10,000 CFP and can be arranged through your hotel.

Activities

DIVING

Rangiroa is one of the best-known dive sites in the Pacific because of its sharks. Divers enter on the ocean side and drift with the strong current into the lagoon. Contact **Paradive** (☎ 96 05 55), the **Raie Manta Club** (☎ 96 84 80; www.raiemantaclub.free.fr), **Six Passengers** (☎ 96 02 60) or **Dream Dive** (☎ 96 03 72). For more on diving in French Polynesia, see p71.

Sleeping

Rangiroa has lots of simple, family-run *pensions* (only a sample is listed here) and a few more luxurious places.

BUDGET

All prices quoted here include half board and are per person unless otherwise noted.

Pension Teina & Marie (☎ 96 03 94; rangiroa@mail.pf; Reporepo; r from 6500 CFP, camping 1000 CFP) Views right over Tiputa Pass and a friendly, laid-back atmosphere make this *pension* one of Rangiroa's best. Watch the dolphins jump in the waves of Tiputa Pass right from the sun-drenched communal deck.

Pension Loyna (☎ 96 82 09; www.pensionloyna.fr.st; Avatoru; r 6000-7500 CFP) A lovely, clean place oozing homeliness. Choose from cheaper rooms with shared bathroom or a two-bedroom family bungalow with bathroom out the back. The ocean is 300m away, but

the warm welcome and high standards make up for everything.

Pension Henri (☎ 96 82 67; pensionhenri@mail.pf; Avatoru; s/d/t 6500/11,000/15,000 CFP, half-board add per person from 2000 CFP, hot water add 4000 CFP) The rustic-chic bungalows and French-Tahitian owners give this place a young, hip vibe different from other options. All rooms are large, with a terrace, and the hot-water bungalow has an exceptionally nice coral floor bathroom. This is the only *pension* facing the ocean side of the atoll.

Rangiroa Lodge (☎ 96 82 13; Avatoru; dm 2000 CFP, d from 5500/4500 CFP) Revitalised by new ownership, this spotless, lively backpacker's lodge is the cheapest place on Rangiroa. Prices do not include half board.

Chez Glorine (☎ 96 04 05; Reporepo; bungalows 7500 CFP) On the lagoon corner of Tiputa Pass, Chez Glorine is well situated for divers and snorkellers. Bungalows are set back from the lagoon, but are cool and shady. Lovers of fine food will enjoy the cooking here (Glorine has made a name as an adept chef, and can often be seen wielding a knife and some freshly caught fish).

MIDRANGE

You can pay with a credit card in most of these places.

Les Fare de Tikihoa (☎ 73 80 13; www.fare-tikihoa.pf; s/d 12,000/16,000 CFP) All alone on a white-sand *motu*, a 45-minute boat ride from the airport, the artistic, local-style architecture of this place makes you really feel away from it all – and you are! The meals here, a mixture of French and Polynesian, are divine. Add 6500 CFP per person for full board.

Le Merou Bleu (☎ 79 16 82; http://Le-Merou-Bleu.france.com; Avatoru; half board 22,000 CFP) Beautifully decorated in an eclectic Polynesian style. The spacious bungalows are nestled in a lush, flowery garden and the French-inspired food is fabulous. Note that prices are per double, not per person. No credit cards are accepted.

Pension Tuanake (☎ 96 04 45; tuanake@mail.pf; Vaimate; half board 10,500 CFP) This *pension* feels like a cross between a family-run place and a hotel. It has two small bungalows with room for three people and two bungalows for six people. It's extremely clean, organised and is set in a coconut plantation near the lagoon. The food is very good.

TOP END

Hotel Kia Ora (☎ 96 03 84; www.hotelkiaora.com; Reporepo; garden/beach/over-water bungalows 35,000/50,000/75,000 CFP) The biggest resort in the Tuamotus and the priciest option on Rangiroa, the Kia Ora is undeniably plush. It has an old-school feel to it: the lounge looks like someplace your grandpa liked to smoke cigars. Bungalows are dotted around a magnificent coconut plantation on the edge of the lagoon. There's a white-sand beach, a restaurant and bar on stilts and a few little craft stalls. All sorts of activities can be arranged.

Novotel Rangiroa Beach Resort (☎ 86 66 66; www.novotel.com; Tevaiohie; r/bungalow 28,000/34,000 CFP) Part of the Sofitel chain, the Novotel is a step down from the luxury of the Kia Ora but is a notch above the midrange group. Bungalows are large although a bit dull but there is nice little pond filled with lily flowers and there is a good swimming beach. The food has not received rave reviews. Transfers cost 1700 CFP return.

Eating

Most people take half board at their *pension*; however, if you don't eat fish, be prepared to cater for yourself. Avatoru and Tiputa have a few supermarkets.

Lagon Burger (☎ 96 04 12; dishes 400-1100 CFP; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) It looks like nothing from the outside but this economical snack place has a French chef serving succulent fish and burgers as well as some of the best salads in French Polynesia. Everything is well presented and the owner plays an interesting mix of international music.

Vaimario (☎ 96 05 96; dishes 2000-2900 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can feast on anything from pizza to grilled fish at this very good restaurant. Free transfers are offered from anywhere in Avatoru.

Hotel Kia Ora (☎ 96 03 84; dishes 1500-4000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is about as fancy as Rangiroan cuisine gets. There's a lovely over-water restaurant and bar, and the lunch menu is much cheaper than the evening version. On Wednesday and Sunday there's a buffet and Polynesian dance performance (5000 CFP).

Pizzeria Filipo (☎ 73 76 20; Avatoru; appetisers 650-1200 CFP, pizzas 1000-1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Here's a great little place right near Rangiroa Lodge backpackers. The food is delicious

(try the daily specials for around 1200 CFP); the large pizzas are huge, and come served on wonderful plates.

Le Kai Kai Restaurant (☎ 96 03 39; Tevaiohie; dishes 1200-2000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a French garden restaurant that has a simple lunch menu and a more elaborate dinner menu including a set option (there's a set menu for children too). Evening cocktails are the lowest priced on the island. Transfers from your Avatoru *pension* or hotel are available free.

Getting There & Away

The airport is smack in between Avatoru (to the west) and Tiputa (to the east). **Air Tahiti** (☎ 93 11 00; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) has an office inside the airport *fare* (house).

Rangiroa is an important link for air and sea communication and is connected by air to Tahiti, Bora Bora, the Marquesas and other atolls in the Tuamotus. There are several flights daily between Rangiroa and Pape'ete (from 15,000 CFP). It's also possible to fly directly from Bora Bora (from 23,000 CFP).

The *Dory*, *Mareva Nui*, *Vai-Aito*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Rairoa Nui* all serve Rangiroa; the *Aranui* stops on Rangiroa on its way back from the Marquesas. For details, see p676.

Getting Around

Getting around Rangiroa is a fairly haphazard affair. There's no public transport, and there's not really enough traffic to rely on hitchhiking.

A sealed road runs the 10km from Avatoru village at the western end of the string of islets to the Tiputa Pass at the eastern extremity. The road is not lit at night, which makes getting around without a car in the evenings virtually impossible. Hire a bicycle or a scooter (it's hardly worth getting a car) for getting around during the day, or resign yourself to not moving much!

There are regular boats (1000 CFP return) that cross the pass separating the Avatoru islets from Tiputa village; taking a bicycle over costs 500 CFP extra.

If you have booked accommodation, your hosts will be at the airport to welcome you. If your *pension* is near the airport, transfers will probably be free; places further away tend to charge (ask when you book).

Europcar (☎ 96 03 28; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) is east of Avatoru and rents cars from 6300/7350 CFP for a half-/full day. **Chez Hélène** (☎ 96 82 84; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) rents out bicycles for 600/1200 CFP a half-/full day; prices drop to 900 CFP a day after the first day.

Location Arenahio (☎ 96 82 45; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat), about 800m east of Avatoru village, hires out cars for 6200/8400 CFP for a half-/full day; scooters are 4200/5200 CFP and bicycles 700/1500 CFP. Credit cards are accepted.

TIKEHAU

pop 406 / lagoon area 461 sq km

Tikehau is almost too good to be true. Time has eroded it away into sweeping, twisting *motu* of white and pink sands that engulf little bays and forgotten nooks. The lagoon is as blue as you'll find anywhere in French Polynesia and the pass houses an exceptional abundance of fish.

The islanders are grouped in the village of Tuherahera, in the southwest of the atoll, leaving the majority of the paradisical *motu* untouched. The people's livelihood is copra production, fishing and, increasingly, tourism. Frequent connections by plane and boat to Tahiti allow the transport of fresh fish to the markets of Pape'ete.

The roughly oval-shaped atoll is 26km on its longest axis. It's cut by Tuheia Pass in the west and by more than 100 *hoa* (channels). A number of islandlike *motu* dot the lagoon.

There is no bank on Tikehau but there is a post office.

Sights & Activities

Scuba diving in the magnificent **Tuheia Pass** is excellent; you're likely to see manta rays and sharks. Rangiroa's Raie Manta Club has an offshoot at **Tikehau Village** (☎ 96 22 86); other dive centres are in the village and at Hôtel Tikehau.

Lagoon excursions allow visitors to explore the magnificent waters. Regular stops include a visit to the rocky **Motu Puarua** (Île aux Oiseaux or Bird Island) where several species of ground-nesting birds are easily spotted. A less common but interesting stop is at **Île de Eden**, an establishment of the Church of the New Testament, who have done a commendable job of creating a vibrant, organic garden in the infertile

sands of their superb *motu*; they also have a fish park filled with blue jacks and *ulua*. A last stop is usually a barbecue picnic on one of many idyllic *motu*. *Pensions* generally organise excursions, and trips cost from 6500 to 7500 CFP per person.

Sleeping & Eating

All *pensions* on Tikehau are on white-sand beaches on the lagoon side of the atoll. Every option, except the top-end resort, is near the village and airport. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are per person per day and include transfers to the airport.

Tikehau Pearl Beach Resort (☎ 96 23 00; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows 48,000-83,000 CFP; ☎) This majestic luxury resort in a dreamy fantasy location has 16 over-water bungalows and 14 beach bungalows. The more expensive bungalows, the furthest east, may get noise from the generator if the wind blows in the wrong direction. There are shuttle boats to the village. Prices are per bungalow.

Pension Panau (☎ 96 22 99; no/half/full board 4000/6000/7000 CFP) One of the best-value places on Tikehau. It's a simple, immaculate place with a welcoming atmosphere and a band of happy dogs. Bungalows on the shady beach are equipped with fan and mosquito nets.

Pension Hotu (☎ 96 22 89; no/half/full board 4000/7000/8500 CFP) On one of the nicest stretches of beach, this friendly, family-run place has five spacious and clean bungalows all with bathroom, fan and thatched roof. Kayaks and mineral water are free.

Tikehau Village (☎ 96 22 86; half/full board 7000/8600 CFP) The beach here is the most spacious on the *motu* but you'll have to share it with the other guests of this popular place. Meals featuring local specialities are served in a large *fare potée* (an open *fare*, usually hosing a restaurant) with a bar and occasionally there is live music at night.

Pension Tematie (☎ /fax 96 22 65; no/half/full board 5500/8500/10,700 CFP) Tastefully designed hexagonal bungalows sit in a shady garden on a small beach. All have attached bathroom, mosquito nets and are very clean. This place is right next to the airport.

Snack Chez Cindy (☎ 96 22 67; mains 700-1200 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) The only snack place in town, this is a busy place serving good *poisson cru*, steak, chow mein and burgers.

Getting There & Away

The airport is about 1km east of the village entrance. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 22 66) flies seven times a week between Pape'ete and Tikehau (from 15,000 CFP), direct or via Rangiroa (from 5500 CFP); several flights a week go to Bora Bora (from 23,000 CFP).

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai Ato* stop at Tikehau.

Getting Around

The 10km track around the *motu* on which Tuherahera is situated passes the airport. Bicycles can be borrowed or hired from your hosts.

MATAIVA

pop 235 / lagoon area 25 sq km

Despite the limited tourist infrastructure, this tiny atoll offers a delightful escape. There are superb and easily accessible beaches, numerous snorkelling spots, lots of fish and one of the few noteworthy archaeological sites in the Tuamotus. Air Tahiti flights make it possible to spend a pleasant weekend here.

The structure of the Mataiva lagoon gives it a particular appearance: the coral constructions at the surface of the water create dividing walls 50m to 300m wide, forming about 70 basins with a maximum depth of 10m. Seen from a plane, the play of light on this underwater tessellation forms a mosaic of green.

Sights & Activities

Marae Papiro is a well-kept *marae* on the edge of a *hoa*, about 14km from the village. In the centre of this *marae*, you can see the stone seat from which, according to legend, the giant Tu guarded the pass against invasion. In the south, along the edge of the lagoon, there are many fine **beaches**. Take your mask and fins along.

Île aux Oiseaux (Bird Island), to the east of the lagoon, is a crescent-shaped coral spit covered in small shrubs. It is a favourite nesting place for *oio*, *tara* and red-footed boobies.

Don't miss the chance to accompany fishermen to trap fish in one of the numerous **fish parks** around the lagoon and the pass. It's exciting to watch the clever way the Paumotu people manage the parks. Sorted, scaled and gutted, the fish are sold in the village.

Sleeping & Eating

The two *pensions* are very similar; only the locations differ. Prices are per person per day and include airport transfers.

Mataiva Village (☎ 96 32 33; bungalows with half board 6200 CFP, camping 1200 CFP) This option has five clean and comfortable two-person bungalows with bathroom (cold water only). It's also one of the few places in the Tuamotus where you can camp.

Super Mataiva Cool (☎ 96 32 53; bungalows with half board 6500 CFP) Run by the friendly Huri family, there are four basic but inviting units with bathroom (cold water only). It offers light meals.

Apart from the *pensions* there's really nowhere to eat, although there are several small shops with basic food supplies.

Getting There & Away

The proprietor of the Mataiva Village *pension* is the local representative of **Air Tahiti** (☎ 96 32 48). There are two Pape'ete-Mataiva flights (from 16,000 CFP) a week, usually on Thursday and Sunday. Return flights depart on the same days.

Mataiva is on the routes of the *Mareva Nui* and *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*.

Getting Around

A track goes almost all the way around the island, in the middle of the coconut plantation. The northern track finishes at Maraé Papiro, about 14km away. The southern track is about 10km long. The *pensions* rent bicycles for about 1000 CFP per day and organise trips to the various sites for about 3000 CFP.

MANIHI

pop 793 / lagoon area 192 sq km

The most accessible and developed atoll in the northern Tuamotus, Manihi once had an international reputation for pearl production. After pearl prices crashed around 2003, a large number of farms went out of business but the lagoon is still scattered with a few family-run and industrial operations. Manihi is now eclipsed by its quiet neighbour Ahe in terms of numbers of pearls produced but it's still a great place to look for the pearl of your dreams.

Shaped like an ellipse, the atoll is 28km long and 8km wide, with only one opening, the Tairapa Pass in the southwest. The

dreamlike beauty of the lagoon and its fecund pass were recognised early on and an international hotel was built in 1977. The best beaches and picnic spots are at the south of the lagoon, where white sand, ruffled palms and sapphire waters make for the perfect escape.

There is no bank on the atoll, though the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort may be able to change money in emergencies. The post office is in Paeua village, opposite the marina. Paeua has a hospital.

Sights & Activities

Don't waste your time in charmless Paeua; instead head straight to the **pearl farms**. Try to visit a small family farm and a larger industrial farm, but avoid holiday periods, particularly Christmas, when the workers may be away. Prices tend to be lower than in Pape'ete or abroad.

All the *pensions* (except Motel Chez Jeanne) and the hotel organise pearl-farm visits, usually combined with a picnic and village excursion from around 3500 CFP. Nothing stops you from contacting the small firms directly. All you have to do is go to the village and ask; you may even find the pearl of your dreams at a very reasonable price.

You can dive with **Manihi Blue Nui** (☎ 96 42 17; www.bluenui.com); there's a great wall dive with excellent marine life.

Sleeping

Manihi offers four distinct options, each on private *motu*. All are great places for families and all accept credit cards.

Pension Vainui (☎ 96 42 89; www.pensionvainui.com; full board per person 8900 CFP) East of the village and about a half an hour boat ride from the airport, this all-inclusive *pension* has eight very funky rooms with shared bathroom. There is not much privacy here but the site is one of the best on the atoll, the welcome is friendly and the food copious and well prepared. Rates include well-organised daily excursions but airport transfers cost 1000 CFP return.

Manihi Pearl Beach Resort (☎ 96 42 73, in Pape'ete 43 16 10; fax 96 42 72, in Pape'ete 43 17 86; beach/over-water bungalows 31,000/67,000 CFP; 🚗) A small and intimate top-end resort two minutes from the airport, the development sits in an airy coconut grove with white-sand beaches, seawater swimming pool

and the magnificent lagoon. The restaurant has a beachfront terrace and there is a bar overlooking the pool, the lagoon and the beach.

Motel Nanihi Paradise (☎ 96 41 54; www.nanihi-paradise.com; bungalows from 13,000 CFP) On a tiny *motu*, this place has two clean, flower bedecked two-bedroom bungalows with fully equipped kitchens and luminous, well-designed bathrooms. Excursions to pearl farms (2300 CFP) are offered as well as lagoon tours (3500 CFP), and diving can be organised through Manihi Blue Nui dive centre. Meals can be arranged.

Motel Chez Jeanne (☎ 96 42 90; motel.chez.jeanne@caramail.com; beach/over-water bungalows 10,000/14,000 CFP) This place is situated on a crescent of white sand, about 9km north-east of the airport. One very private over-the-water bungalow for two people and two beachside bungalows for up to four people have attached bathrooms and fully equipped kitchens. It's possible to order breakfast (300 CFP) or dinner (1800 CFP) but self-catering is encouraged.

Eating

Apart from the *pensions* and hotel, there are hardly any places to eat. In Paeua, there is a well-stocked shop, Libre Service Jean-Marie, near the marina and another smaller shop at the quay on the pass.

Poe Rava Restaurant (☎ 96 42 73; dishes 1400-2800 CFP; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) At Manihi Pearl Beach Resort, this restaurant has extremely reasonable prices, especially for lunch. The setting by the swimming pool and lagoon is delightful.

Getting There & Away

The **Air Tahiti office** (☎ 96 43 34) is in Paeua. On flight days the representative goes to the airport. There are almost daily flights between Pape'ete and Manihi (from 19,000 CFP).

The *Mareva Nui*, *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Manihi. Loading and unloading takes place at the Paeua quay in the pass.

Getting Around

The only track on Manihi links Motu Tauraufara to the airport, covering a total distance of only about 9km. Getting around the atoll requires some ingenuity and, for

the most part, a boat. The Manihi Pearl Beach Resort rents bicycles for around 1000 CFP per day but you can't get too far and the road is barren and shadeless.

The airport is at the southwestern end of the atoll, two minutes away from Manihi Pearl Beach Resort. To get to the village you have no choice but to hitch a boat ride from the quay, right next to the airport fare.

To get to the dive centre from the village, you can use the Manihi Pearl Beach Resort staff shuttle boat, which generally leaves the Paeua marina at about 6am and returns around 4pm. It'll take you for free. If they're going to the airport or the village, resort owners will generally take you across to the dive centre. For other points around the atoll, talk to boat owners in the village.

AHE

pop 377 / lagoon area 170 sq km

Until recently, Ahe, 15km west of Manihi, was only known to pearl farmers and to yachties, who often pull in when sailing from the Marquesas. Those who want to head off the beaten track will appreciate this atoll's quietness, idyllic scenery and gentle pace of life.

Ahe is 20km long by 10km wide. The dusty, flower-filled village of Tenukupara is on the southwest side. Most of the island's economy is based on pearl farming and Ahe has quietly become the largest pearl-producing atoll in the Tuamotus.

Tourist facilities are still very limited. In a coconut plantation facing the lagoon, **Coco Perles** (☎ 96 44 08; www.cocoperle.com; bungalow per person with half/full board from 10,000/15,000 CFP) has six well-decorated local-style bungalows. Excellent meals are served in a fare by the lagoon. Activities include snorkelling, kayaking and lounging. Excursions to the nearby bird *motu* or to a pearl farm cost 1000 CFP. Bring plenty of mosquito repellent.

Chez Raita (☎ 96 44 53; pension.raita@mail.pf; bungalows with half board per person 7500 CFP, picnic lunch 1000 CFP) is owned by the local fireman and his family. It's a friendly and charming place on a white-sand *motu* on the east side of the atoll.

Air Tahiti flies to Ahe five times weekly, departing from Pape'ete (from 17,000 CFP); flights are direct or via Manihi.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Mareva Nui*, *Dory* and *Vai-Aito* service Ahe.

TAKAROA & TAKAPOTO

Takaroa pop 490 / lagoon area 113 sq km;

Takapoto pop 612 / lagoon area 102 sq km

The atolls of Takaroa (Long Chin) and Takapoto (Short Chin) are labelled the King George Islands on marine maps.

Rectangular Takaroa Atoll is 27km long by 6km wide and has only one pass, in the southeast, into the lagoon. Ninety percent of the 488 residents are Mormons and alcohol is prohibited. There is no bank but there is a post office, a shop and two *pensions*. Takaroa's lagoon has numerous **coral formations**, which are wonderful for snorkelling. At least four flights a week go to Pape'ete (from 18,000 CFP) and Takapoto (from 4400 CFP).

Takapoto is 9km south. It is 20km long and 6km across at its widest point and doesn't have a pass. With its pearl farms, white-sand beaches and archaeological remains, Takapoto could one day become a popular tourist destination. The atoll has no bank but there is a post office.

The interesting **Marae Takai** archaeological site is worth the long walk northeast of Fakatopater. Follow the track that goes past the cemetery at the village exit for 15km. You will see a channel spanned by a stone bridge. Cross this bridge and, immediately on the right, walk 60m along the channel towards the lagoon. Turn left and clear your way through bush for about 30m to reach the three *marae* in a little clearing.

Takapoto Village (☎ 98 65 44; bungalow with half board per person 7000 CFP), on a small yellow-sand beach beside the lagoon, southeast of the village, has a comfortable bungalow and a room.

The airport is a stone's throw southeast of the village. Air Tahiti flies three times a week to Pape'ete (from 17,200 CFP).

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella* and *Mareva Nui* serve Takapoto. *Taporo IV* and *Aranui*, en route to the Marquesas Islands, also stop there.

Bicycle is the best way to discover the atoll's few short tracks. Most guesthouses organise picnics on deserted *motu*, reached by speedboat (about 2000 CFP per person).

FAKARAVA

pop 712 / lagoon area 1121 sq km

Magnificent Fakarava is the second-largest atoll in the Tuamotus. The pass through

the reef offers amazing diving and several dive cruise operators visit the atoll. Most people live in Rotoava village at the north-eastern end, 4km east of the airport. About 1km from the village centre, **Havaiki Pearl Guesthouse** (☎ 93 40 16; www.havaiki.com; s/d with half board 13,000/19,000 CFP, 3 night minimum) offers four bungalows on a small but magnificent beach. The food is tasty and plentiful and masks, snorkels and bikes are available for guests' use. The owner here offers an interesting activity he calls 'pearl fishing'; for 2500 CFP you can dive down and pick a grafted oyster, open it then keep the pearl you find inside. On the ocean side of the *motu* at Rotoava, **Relais Marama** (☎ /fax 98 42 51; camping per person 1800 CFP, s/d 3800/5600 CFP, s/d bungalow 4400/6800 CFP) is a good-value option with four functional rooms and two bungalows with shared bathroom (cold water only). All prices include breakfast and half board is available for an extra 1800 CFP, or you can use the communal kitchen.

A beautiful garden, comfortable bungalows and a pretty beach make **Tokerau Village** (☎ 98 41 09; s/d bungalows with half board 12,000/22,000 CFP) another excellent choice.

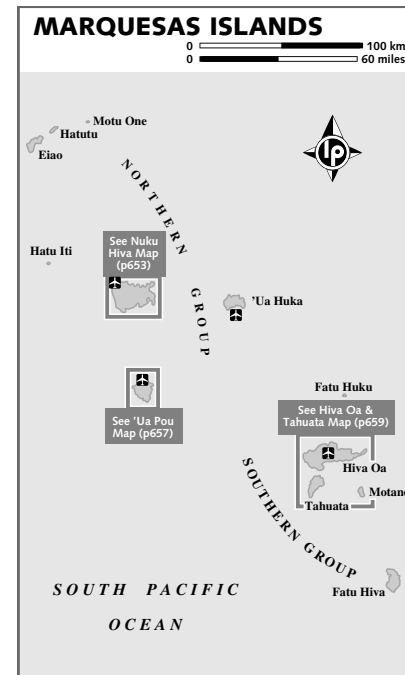
The airport is about 4km west of Rotoava. **Air Tahiti** (☎ 67 70 35/85; www.airtahiti.pf) flies Pape'ete-Fakarava every day from 16,500 CFP one way and Rangiroa-Fakarava every Tuesday and Friday from 5200 CFP.

The *Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella*, *Vai-Aito* and *Mareva Nui* stop at Fakarava.

From Rotoava a track goes to the southwest of the atoll for about 40km. The guesthouses arrange boat excursions.

MARQUESAS ISLANDS

Paul Gauguin, Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stephenson, Jack London... Over the last 170 years the Marquesas have been an escape for artists, writers, adventurers and musicians. And it's no wonder! What could be more inspiring than a land opulent in ripe fruit, smiling, strong people and green summits? A trip to the Marquesas is a journey that tickles the heart, questions the mind and tests the muscles. After laughing with the locals, learning about ancient traditions and hiking through the jungle to the desert of the interior, you too could return home on a creative high.



The Marquesas' dramatic coastline of cliffs, needles and peaks towering to more than 1000m is the result of waves smashing against the rock, unmitigated by any sheltering reefs or lagoons. This rugged landscape is ridged with deep valleys draped in luxuriant tropical vegetation.

The small numbers of visitors who do come here are privileged to experience the mysterious ambience and warm welcome of a place yet to be discovered by mass tourism.

The archipelago is half an hour ahead of Tahiti time.

Transport

The Marquesas stretch over 350km and are divided into northern and southern groups. Only six of the 15 islands are inhabited and travelling within the archipelago can be difficult.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air Tahiti flies direct between Pape'ete and the Marquesas and, once weekly, from Rangiroa, in the Tuamotus, to Nuku Hiva. Nuku Hiva, Hiva Oa, 'Ua Huka and 'Ua Pou have

IMPORTANT! READ THIS...

The Marquesas are *not* a beach destination, although there are a few enticing beaches. As appealing as these beaches may look, the reality is they are invariably infested with *nono* – a small, aggressive biting fly that locals will tell you is ‘fiercer than lions.’ Even the hardest of adventurers can be brought to their knees (and the edges of their fingernails) by the nearly invisible, but undeniably hostile *nono*. Cover yourself in lightweight trousers and long-sleeve shirts and whip out the jungle juice. The bites of this little fly can leave welts that itch like no other. Fortunately they are found almost exclusively on beaches and do not carry diseases. Best to stay in the mountains and valleys where there are endless opportunities for hiking, horse riding, exploring the almost overwhelming number of archaeological sites or simply discovering this mysteriously wonderful culture.

airports. Three flights a week go from Nuku Hiva to 'Ua Pou, and one to 'Ua Huka.

The *Taporo IV* and *Aranui* serve the Marquesas, travelling from Pape'ete via the Tuamotus (Rangiroa and/or Takapoto). Taiohae, Hakahau and Atuona are the only places with quays where the ships can dock; at other ports unloading is done with *bonitiers* (whaleboats). For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around the Marquesas is difficult. The valleys are isolated, making it virtually impossible to tour by road, and only the main settlements have sealed roads. Some settlements have no landing stage and rough seas make landings challenging to say the least. The introduction of helicopter shuttles within the northern and southern groups has improved inter-island transport. **Héli Inter Marqueses** (☎ 92 02 17; helico-nuku@mail.pf; Taiohae, Nuku Hiva) does convenient but costly charters on Nuku Hiva and flies three times a week to 'Ua Pou, and to 'Ua Huka on demand.

Inter-island travel is via Air Tahiti, helicopters, *bonitiers* and the cargo ships *Taporo IV* and *Aranui*. Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa are the hub islands; travel between these two is regular and reliable, but further afield can be more difficult. Don't expect things to go to schedule.

NUKU HIVA

pop 2632 / area 340 sq km

This huge (the second-largest in French Polynesia after Tahiti) sparsely populated island offers an astonishing range of terrain, from wind-swept cliffs to lush river valleys and deep bays to barren desert. The

main town of Taiohae has an enticing atmosphere that's part colonial port, part stone-age art hub.

With several flights a week from Pape'ete, Nuku Hiva is an easily accessible, active destination for hiking, horse riding and diving that's yet to be overrun with luxury resorts. The archaeological sites are some of the most impressive in French Polynesia and local art and culture is alive and well.

Information

The following are in Taiohae.

Banque Socredo (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 63; 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) Currency exchange and ATM. Next to the Kovivi restaurant on the waterfront.

Hospital (Map p654; ☎ 91 20 00) Down a side road at the eastern end of the bay.

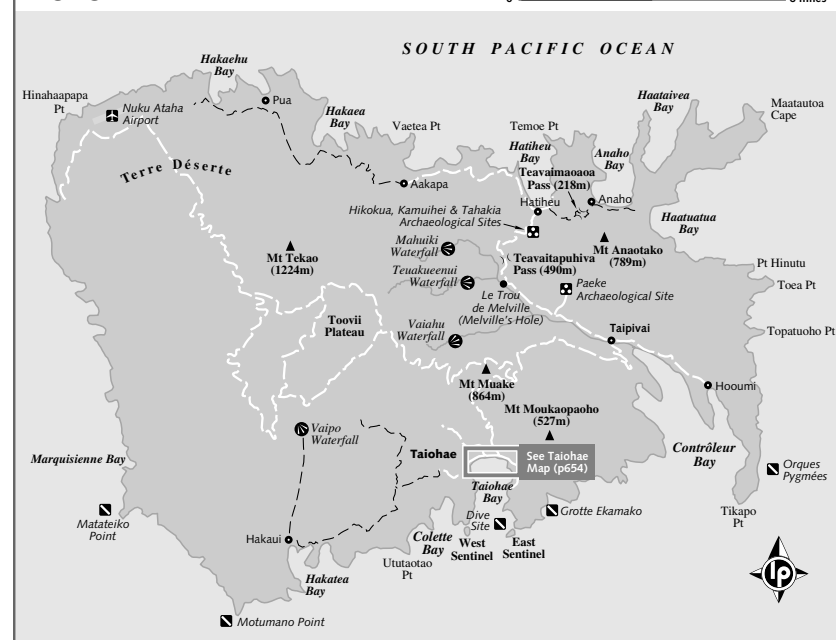
Nuku Hiva visitor information centre (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 73; marqueses@mail.pf; 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Currently next to the Heli-Inter Marquise office and soon to move to a new building at the marina, this friendly office can help organise activities throughout the Marquesas.

Post office (Map p654; 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 2pm Fri) On the eastern side of the bay.

Sights

Taiohae (Map p654), the main centre, hugs Taiohae Bay for nearly 3.5km. Climb the Meau Valley for less than 1km to reach a restored *me'ae* (Marquesan equivalent of *marae*, where religious ceremonies were performed), with a small contemporary *tiki*. The **Herman Melville memorial** is west of the town; the *Moby Dick* author made nearby Taipivai famous in his book *Typee*. The restored **Tohua Koueva**, a sacred place venerated by the ancient Marquesans, is 1.5km up the Pakiu Valley on the road to Taipivai.

NUKU HIVA



Walk or drive along a picturesque track to the summit of 864m **Mt Muake** (Map p653). The cool **Toovii Plateau** (Map p653), crossed by the Taiohae–Terre Déserte (airport) track and nestled among mountains, looks surprisingly like the mountains of Bavaria.

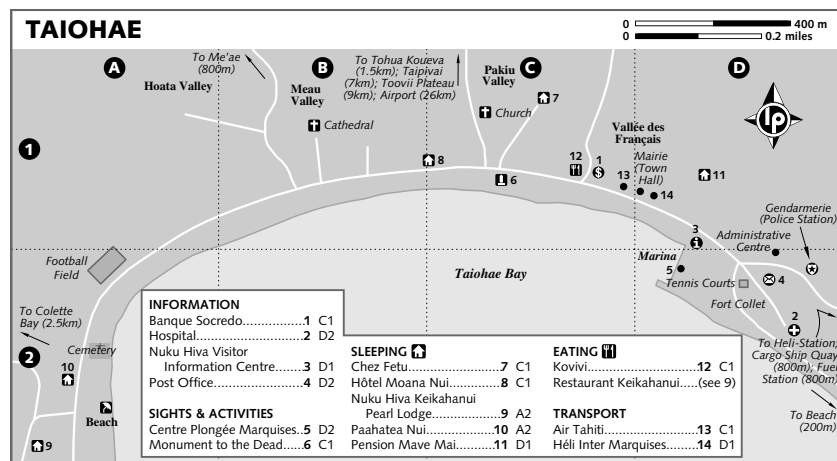
About 8km west of Taiohae, the **Hakau Valley** is one of the island's most imposing sights. The river has cut vertical walls of nearly 800m into the basalt and after rain the **Vaipo Waterfall** (Map p653), at 350m one of the highest in the world, thunders into a basin. From Taiohae, the valley can be reached by speedboat (the journey takes around 20 minutes), or on foot (two hours).

Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson succumbed to the charm of **Hatiheu** (Map p653) in the north of the island, 12km from Taipivai and 28km from Taiohae. The town's focal point is the wooden **church**, and the tiny seafront *mairie* houses a small **museum** with a collection of traditional Marquesan artefacts. From Taipivai, follow the main road inland and

west. The track tends to deteriorate as it climbs to the 490m **Teavaitapuhiva Pass** (Map p653), where you can enjoy some magnificent views. Shortly before Hatiheu is the **Hikokua archaeological site** (Map p653), where modern *tiki* have been added to the old ones, and the vast **Kamuihei & Tahakia archaeological site** (Map p653).

Peaceful **Anaho** (Map p653) can be reached by speedboat from Hatiheu (10 minutes) or on foot (45 minutes) along a picturesque track. The descent from Teavaimaaoa Pass (218m), through a huge coconut plantation, is quite steep. A long white-sand beach runs beside one of the Marquesas best, sheltered anchorages. On the north coast, **Aakapa** (Map p653) is in a superb setting below high peaks; it can be reached on foot from Hatiheu or by speedboat.

Charming **Hooumi** (Map p653), surrounded by luxuriant vegetation, is about 4km east of Taipivai. The hamlet has a picturesque small timber church and a stunning, but *nono*-plagued, white-sand beach.



Activities

DIVING

Centre Plongée Marquises (Map p654; ☎ 92 00 88), in Taiohae, is the Marquesas' dive centre. Encounters with dolphins, hammerhead sharks and many other species make up for less-than-amazing visibility (only about 20m).

WALKING

There are good walking tracks all over the island. **Marquises Rando** (☎ 92 07 13; www.marquisesrando.com; trips from 5000 CFP) offers some amazing guided hikes ranging from half-day walks along the coast to three-day adventures across the island; it also offers a chance to observe some of Nuku Hiva's unique endemic bird species.

HORSE RIDING

From Taiohae, it is easy to reach Colette Bay on horseback. Other popular rides are to the Vaipo waterfall, along the track between Hatiheu and Aakapa and on the Taiohae ridgeline. To hire horses, contact **Sabine Teikiteitini** (☎ 92 01 56; per day 7000 CFP) in Hatiheu.

Sleeping

TAIOHAE

Hôtel Moana Nui (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 30; pension moananui@mail.pf; s/d incl breakfast 7100/7800 CFP; ☼) On the seafront in the centre of Taiohae, the seven spotless rooms have attached bathrooms (with hot water) and

lovely carved wooden doors opening onto minuscule terraces. Half board can be arranged.

Pension Mave Mai (Map p654; ☎ 92 08 10; pension -mavemai@mail.pf; s/d/t 7000/8000/9000 CFP; ☼) A clean and inviting pension. All rooms have views over Taiohae Bay. Excursions by boat and 4WD to the main sights are offered. Half board adds 2500 CFP per person.

Nuku Hiva Keikahanui Pearl Lodge (Map p654; ☎ 92 07 10; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows 20,000-39,000 CFP; ☼) Nuku Hiva's swankiest option comprises 20 bungalows overlooking the western edge of Taiohae Bay. The ambience is intimate and there's a tiny swimming pool.

Chez Fetu (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 66; r per person 2000 CFP) The single bungalow is rustic but clean and the elderly owners make you feel right at home. It's about 200m up a small dirt path that starts at the west side of the Kamake shop.

Paahatea Nui (Chez Justin et Julienne; Map p654; ☎ 92 00 97; paahateanui@mail.pf; bungalows per person 4400 CFP) Next to Hôtel Nuku Hiva Village, this option has a cluster of basic but large bungalows with bathroom in a garden full of pamplemousse trees. There's no restaurant but you can use the kitchen.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Ferme-auberge de Toovii (☎ 79 07 49; ferme-auberge@mail.pf; Toovii Plateau; bungalow with half board per person 6000 CFP) In the heart of the island's main crater, this ferme-auberge (farmhouse

hotel) is completely isolated. There are five plain, clean bungalows with bathroom and terrace, and there is a dining room and a bar. Meals are prepared using meat from animals raised on the farm and vegetables from the farm's market garden.

Chez Yvonne (☎ 92 02 97; hinakonui@mail.pf; s/d 5000/7000 CFP, half board per person 8000 CFP) Nuku Hiva's first pension, run by Yvonne Katupa, the mayor of Hatiheu, is as clean and well managed as her village. At the time of writing, construction of new bungalows was underway. Meals are taken in the excellent Restaurant Hinakonui a few hundred metres down the road. Airport transfers for 4000 CFP one way need to be arranged in advance. All sorts of activities are available.

Eating

Kovivi (Map p654; ☎ 92 03 85; set lunch 1400 CFP, dishes 1300-1800 CFP; ☼ closed Sun & Mon evening) An excellent restaurant in Taiohae with friendly service and very reasonable prices. Dishes are mostly classic French with tropical influences but there is usually a sprinkling of local dishes on the menu as well. There is a decent wine list.

Restaurant Hinakonui (☎ 92 02 97; dishes 1600-2500 CFP; ☼ lunch & dinner) In Hatiheu, this restaurant has a magnificent terrace that opens directly onto the seafront. The menu includes poisson cru, lobster and shrimp. To try the excellent Marquesan oven (pork and fish, cooked in an oven hollowed out of the ground), you need at least 12 people, so contact Chez Yvonne to see if a group will be visiting. Reservations are essential.

Restaurant Keikahanui (Map p654; ☎ 92 07 10; set lunch 1700 CFP, dinner 1200-3500 CFP; ☼ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the Nuku Hiva Keikahanui Pearl Lodge, this place in a lovely terraced area overlooking the bay has a varied menu with fish, meat and pasta dishes.

Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti (☎ 92 03 41) is on the eastern side of the cove at Tahiohae and at the **Nuku Ataha airport** (☎ 92 01 45).

There are daily flights between Pape'ete and Nuku Hiva (from 28,000 CFP). There is also one direct flight per week from Rangiroa to Nuku Hiva (from 28,000 CFP) but no service going back to Rangiroa.

Within the Marquesas there are flights from Nuku Hiva to Hiva Oa (from 10,000

CFP), 'Ua Huka and 'Ua Pou (both from 6000 CFP). There are three Nuku Hiva-'Ua Huka return flights a week, and there are four Nuku Hiva-'Ua Pou return flights weekly.

Héli Inter Marquises (☎ 92 02 17) has regular helicopter shuttle services to 'Ua Pou (from 12,500 CFP one way) on Tuesdays or you can charter a flight to any of the other inhabited islands of the archipelago.

The *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI* stop at Nuku Hiva, as well as several cruise ships including the *Gauguin* and the *Tahitian Princess*, and dock at the end of the bay in Taiohae. The *Aranui* goes to Taipivai and Hatiheu as well as Taiohae.

Getting Around

A network of tracks links the airport, Taiohae, Taipivai, Hooumi, Hatiheu and Aakapa.

It's only 18km from Taiohae to Nuku Ataha Airport at Terre Déserte but it takes at least two hours along the bumping, winding track. Approved 4WD taxis generally wait for each flight. It is nevertheless wise to book, either through your hotel or pension, or directly by contacting the taxi drivers: **Marie-Jeanne Ah-Scha** (☎ 92 01 84), **Rose Utia** (☎ 92 00 56), **Magalie Kimitete** (☎ 27 47 56) or **Leonard Hokaupoko** (☎ 74 44 60). It's also possible to hitch.

Héli Inter Marquises (☎ 92 02 17) provides a helicopter shuttle service coinciding with each Pape'ete-Nuku Hiva flight, going to Taiohae, Hatiheu and Taipivai. The trip costs 7500 CFP per person (half-fare for children under 11) and takes eight minutes. Reservations are essential.

You can rent 4WDs with or without a driver. From Taiohae, the whole vehicle (which will take four passengers) with a driver costs around 12,000 CFP to Taipivai, 20,000 CFP to Hatiheu and 25,000 CFP to Aakapa. The hotels in Taiohae will try to group their customers.

Nuku Rent a Car (☎ 92 08 87; 4WDs half/full day 8000/12,000 CFP, scooter half/full day 4000/5500 CFP, bikes per day 1500 CFP) is located on the Taiohae quay. Prices include insurance.

'UA HUKA

pop 582 / area 83 sq km

It's been dubbed the 'Island of Horses', and there are about as many horses on the island as people, but 'Ua Huka could just as

easily be called the island of sculptors. The island's only three villages: Vaipae, Hane and Hokatu, are filled with small workshops where rosewood, *tou* and coconut are fashioned into *tikis*, plates, bowls and the like. Besides being a fantastic place to buy carvings, 'Ua Huka's small size makes it easy to meet the artists themselves and to delve right in to Marquesan life. After a day or two the community seems to absorb you like a giant, friendly sponge; this is the kind of place that tempts you to do like Gauguin and devote your life to love, art and nature.

Amazingly, aside from *Aranui* passengers, most travellers bypass 'Ua Huka's charms for those of its more developed neighbours: Nuku Hiva and 'Ua Pou.

Sights

The island's main town, **Vaipae**, is at the end of the very narrow, deep and aptly named Invisible Bay. When the *Aranui* comes in, it manoeuvres in a space the size of a handkerchief and ties up to the rock face. The **museum** (admission free, donations appreciated) in the town centre has great symbolic value for heritage-proud Marquesans and displays pestles, *tiki*, sculptures, *pahu* (drums), jewellery and period photos as well as a *ha'e* (traditional house). The **arboretum**, halfway between Vaipae and Hane, offers a striking contrast between the wealth of plants and the relative aridity of the island. Inside the gates of the arboretum is the small **wood museum** (admission free), which displays different types of wood from around the world and those indigenous to 'Ua Huka. Each village also has a *fare artisanal* (craft centre). **Hane** was said to be the first Polynesian settlement in the Marquesas and has a small marine museum. Less than 30 minutes' walk from the village, the **Meiaute archaeological site** is one of 'Ua Huka's major attractions, with *tiki*, *pae pae* (ancient house structures) and *me'ae*.

Peaceful **Hokatu** is about 3km east of Hane in a sheltered bay. *Tupapau* (ghosts) are said to haunt **Grotte aux Pas** (Footstep Cave), slightly west of Point Tekeho, between Vaipae and Haavei Bay.

Thousands of *kaveka* have taken up residence on the *motu* of **Hemeni** and **Teuaua**, near the southwestern point of 'Ua Huka.

'Ua Huka has the Marquesas' most beautiful beaches, although you still can't

escape the *nono*. Accessible by speedboat or 4WD, **Manihina Beach**, between Vaipae and the airport, is fringed with fine white sand. **Hatuana Beach** is in the west of the island; there are petroglyphs nearby. **Haavei Beach** is a beautiful inlet that belongs to the Lichtlé family; ask them (they live on the coconut plantation) for permission before plunging in. **Motu Papa**, a popular picnic and snorkelling spot, is just offshore from the airport, between Vaipae and Hane. A speedboat drops you about 50m offshore and you have to swim ashore.

Activities

It's a beautiful three-hour **walk** inland from Vaipae or Hane to the **Vaikivi petroglyphs**. The path climbs the long face of the ancient volcano caldera. Take a guide (3000 CFP to 5000 CFP), as it's a long way and the trail isn't marked; ask about guides at your *pension*. The coastal route between Haavei and Hokatu offers spectacular views and is worth doing.

The most popular **horse ride** is from Vaipae to Hane, passing the arboretum, airport and windswept arid plateaus before reaching the cliff road, which plunges towards Hane. A ride typically costs 6500 CFP, with guide (ask at your accommodation).

Sleeping & Eating

'Ua Huka has a surprising number of guest-houses; all offer half board, with good food and Marquesan specialities.

Mana Tupuna Village (☎ 92 61 01; manatupuna@mail.pf; s/d 5000/9000 CFP, with half board 7000/13,000 CFP) Perched on the side of a flowery hill, this place has three local-style bungalows on stilts, elegantly arranged with covered veranda, mezzanine and bathroom. There are beautiful views over the valley below. The restaurant is airy, colourful and inviting.

Le Reve Marquisienne (☎ 92 61 84; revemarquisienne@mail.pf; s/d 9500/11,500 CFP) Tucked away in the valley of Vaipae, the bungalows here are the newest and most comfortable (although remote) option on 'Ua Huka. Owner Marie-France really goes out of her way to take care of her guests. Meals can be arranged.

Chez Maurice & Delphine (☎ 92 60 55; bungalows per person with half board 6000 CFP) With wonderful views of Motu Hane, this place has three bungalows with verandas, one of which

can accommodate six people. Owner Maurice is also one of the best sculptors on the island.

Auberge Hitikau (☎ /fax 92 61 74; s/d 2500/3500 CFP, with half board 6000/10,500 CFP) This place has four basic but clean double rooms with shared bathroom (cold water only). The grandmotherly owner will try to fatten you up on her exceptionally good Marquesan cooking: the guesthouse has the only real restaurant on the island. Local specialities have pride of place: goat, pork, fish in coconut milk, *kaveka*-egg omelettes (in the right season) and some delicious cakes. Bookings are essential.

Snack Christelle (☎ 92 60 34) The industrious Christelle, Air Tahiti representative and *pension* owner, also runs a little snack place in Vaipae. Most of what she makes (*poisson cru*, chow mein, sandwiches) is delivered around the island and can be found in the local shops from around 10am. Otherwise you can call in advance to order a meal there.

Getting There & Away

There are three flights a week to Nuku Hiva (from 6000 CFP) and Pape'ete (from 30,400 CFP). Contact the **Air Tahiti representative** (☎ 92 60 85) in Vaipae.

You can organise transfers to 'Ua Pou or Nuku Hiva by speedboat through Maurice Rootuehine at **Chez Maurice & Delphine** (☎ 92 60 55). The *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI* stop at 'Ua Huka.

Getting Around

A 13km track links Vaipae to Hokatu via Hane; the stretch from Vaipae to Hane is surfaced. Haavei is also accessible by the track from Vaipae. The airport is midway between Vaipae and Hane. Transfers are usually included in *pension* prices.

The *pension* owners can take you by 4WD to visit the villages (10,000 CFP per day).

'UA POU

pop 2110 / area 125 sq km

'Ua Pou is a paradox: a dry, desert island with oasis-like valleys bursting with enough tropical fruit to feed 10 times its population. Twelve obelisk-like pinnacles of basalt, once the cores of 12 now defunct volcanoes create an unforgettable skyline that is often photographed for the classic postcard shot



of the Marquesas. It's only 45km south of Nuku Hiva, but it feels a world away.

Tourism has gone a little backwards on 'Ua Pou: archaeological sites that were once cleared and maintained are blocked by barbed wire and marked as private property; a museum constructed in the centre of the main village of Hakahau is now used as a temporary office for the mayor. With the Marquesas Festival of 2007 being hosted by 'Ua Pou, one can only hope the island will put its cultural richness back to full value and properly welcome the rest of the archipelago.

Information

Banque Socredo (Hakahau) In the Hakahau *mairie*. It changes notes and travellers cheques and does credit-card cash advances.

Medical centre In the south of Hakahau.

Post office To the west of the bay.

Sights

The admirably restored **Tenei pae pae** in the middle of Hakahau is a platform of massive stone blocks supporting a shelter

Bay, at the mouth of the Vaioa River, the town stretches up the valley for about 1.5km. The **Cultural Centre** (adult/child 600/300 CFP; ☎ 8am-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat), which follows the life of Paul Gauguin through his letters and, of course, his art, is well worth a visit. Once you've made a full round of the paintings, timeline and literature, head outside and down a small path to the **Maison du Jouis**, a replica of Gauguin's house with some works of local artists displayed inside.

Gauguin and Brel are buried in the small **Calvaire Cemetery**, which dominates Atuona Bay.

It's a pleasant walk into the Faakua Valley to see the **Tehueto petroglyphs**, where stylised, horizontal human figures have been carved into an enormous basalt block. Near the village of Taaoa, 7km southwest of Atuona, another site, **Tohua Upeke**, has more than 1000 *pae pae*, some of which are restored.

AROUND THE ISLAND

The village of **Puamau**, a 2½-hour drive east from Atuona, has an elegant seafront with a black-sand beach and is close to the most beautiful archaeological site in the Marquesas. In the village, **Tohua Pehe Kua** is the tomb of the valley's last chief.

Tiny **Hanapaaoa** is in an area of wild beauty two hours' drive northwest from Atuona. Walk 15 minutes southeast to the strange **Tiki Moe One**, adorned with a carved crown of flowers; you'll probably need a guide to find it.

There are **beaches** at Atuona, Puamau, Hanamenu and Hanatekuua.

Activities

Around Atuona there are relatively easy **walks** to the Tehueto petroglyphs and to the Jacques Brel Memorial. For hiking contact **Hiva Oa Rando-Trek** (☎ 20 40 90; hikes from 5000 CFP), which leads more interesting hikes than you'll find offered through the *pensions*. If you'd rather go **horse riding**, contact **Hamau Ranch** (☎ 92 70 57; per 2½hr 7000 CFP), which is the most professional ranch in the Marquesas. The guide, Paco, is knowledgeable about local flora and legends and can also take adventurous, confirmed riders on a pig hunt.

Sleeping

Accommodation is mainly concentrated in Atuona and its surrounding area. Unless otherwise noted, credit cards are accepted.

Pension Tahauku (☎ 72 34 73; s/d 6000/8000 CFP) Nestled in a garden of lemon trees, hibiscus and roaming horses, the bungalows here are large and tastefully decorated. It's a friendly, family atmosphere. Meals can be taken at the very good snack bar on the premises (breakfast 1000 CFP). No credit cards.

Pension Gauguin (☎ 92 73 51; pens.gauguin@mail.pf; s/d with half board 7000/13,000 CFP) The spotless rooms at this centrally located *pension* feature big, bright windows. There is a relaxed ambience, a breezy communal area and reasonably priced excursions on offer.

Hankeré Pearl Lodge (☎ 92 75 87; www.pearlresorts.com; bungalows from 24,000 CFP; ☎ ☎ ☎) Even though it's the most luxurious hotel in the Marquesas, it still feels intimate and unpretentious. The 20 bungalows have unforgettable bay views. Excursions here are more expensive than elsewhere, so you're better off organizing activities through the visitor information centre in Atuona or through other *pensions*.

Pension Moehau (☎ 92 72 69; moehaupension@mail.pf; s/d 5500/7500 CFP, with half board 9000/15,000 CFP) Four modern, agreeable rooms face an ocean-view terrace while four more face the dark hill behind. Ask for an oceanside room!

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pension Kanahau (☎ 91 71 31; pensionkanahau@mail.pf; s/d 9500/11,500 CFP, with half board 14,000/20,000 CFP) 'Kanahau' means good, beautiful and delicious in Marquesan and this pension is all these things and more. There are superb views from the elegant, spacious bungalows and the food (served under a mango tree) is gourmet. The owners do such an all-out job of taking care of their guests you begin to wonder if the Tahiti Tourism Bureau isn't experimenting with some secret new drug that turns them into superhosts. No credit cards.

Eating

In Atuona, you will find several well-stocked grocery stores including the colonial-style, picture-worthy Magazine Gauguin. There are two small grocery shops in Puamau.

Snack Tahuaku (☎ 72 34 73; dishes 800-1000 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Great food, good ambience

and even better prices! You have no excuse (except maybe the 2km walk from town) not to eat here.

Hoa Nui (☎ 92 73 63; set meal 2500 CFP; ☎ by reservation only) This restaurant specialises in Marquesan cuisine and you need to reserve about a day in advance. Make sure the food will be Marquesan when you book because the Chinese cuisine is considerably less tasty.

Restaurant Moehau (☎ 92 72 69; pizzas 1100-1700 CFP, dishes 1500-2800 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's worth stopping in one night for a pizza at this terrace restaurant. There are also good fish and meat dishes available as well as wine (from 1800 CFP a bottle) and cocktails.

Getting There & Away

Air Tahiti (☎ 92 73 41; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is in Atuona next to Banque Socredo. It offers flights (not always direct) to Pape'ete (from 31,000 CFP), Nuku Hiva (from 10,000 CFP), 'Ua Pou (from 7500 CFP) and 'Ua Huka (from 7500 CFP).

The **Aranui** and **Taporo IV** stop at Hiva Oa. **Leo Rohi** (☎/fax 92 76 57) has a fast, comfortable and secure *bonitier* that can be chartered. It costs 20,000 to 25,000 CFP for an Atuona-Vaitahu/Hapatoni (Tahuata) return trip, around 15,000 CFP for the Atuona-Motupu (Tahuata) return trip and 45,000 CFP for an Atuona-Hanavave (Fatu Hiva) return trip. Find out which charters are being organised during your stay and you may be able to share the costs.

Getting Around

The airport is 13km from Atuona. If you have booked accommodation your host will collect you. It's also possible to hitch.

David Location (☎ 92 72 87), **Atuona Rent-a-Car** (☎ 92 76 07, 72 17 17) and **Hiva Oa Location** (☎ 73 83 83, 91 70 60) all rent 4WDs for 15,000 CFP a day, with unlimited kilometres and insurance included. There's a petrol station at the cargo-ship quay at Tahauku Bay.

Excursions by 4WD cost about 10,000 CFP to Taaoa, 12,000 CFP to Hanaiapa, 20,000 CFP to Hanapaaoa and 20,000 CFP to Puamau: these prices are for the whole car so it's cheaper to go with a bigger group. For information contact your *pension*.

TAHUATA

pop 671 / area 70 sq km

Just as lush but not as steep, Tahuata (meaning 'sunrise' in Marquesan) is Hiva Oa's shy little sister. Separated from Hiva Oa by the 4km-wide Bordelais Channel, it is the smallest inhabited island in the archipelago. With more and more day tours being conducted from Hiva Oa, Tahuata's accessibility is increasing, bringing in the possibility of more *pensions* in the near future.

For tourist information, contact the Vaitahu **mairie** (☎ 92 92 19) on the seafront. There is no bank. The post office and infirmary are in Vaitahu.

On the hill that dominates tiny Vaitahu village are a few remains of the **French fort**. The seafront stone **Catholic church** includes a wooden statue which is a masterpiece of modern Marquesan art. A small Polynesian art and history **museum** is in the *mairie*. Copra-drying sheds are dotted here and there, and brightly coloured traditional *vaka* (outrigger canoes) are lined up on the shore. Some top-rate Marquesan sculptors work in Vaitahu.

Hapatoni curves around a wide bay several kilometres south of Vaitahu by boat (15 minutes) or bridleway. It has a 19th-century royal road and a magnificent **me'ae**.

Motopu, to the north of Vaitahu, has a few dozen inhabitants and is accessible by 4WD by the track that crosses the island's interior.

Hanamoenoa Bay is a favourite anchorage for yachts between March and August.

The 17km track that joins Vaitahu and Motopu is ideal for **horse riding**; ask the locals about hiring horses.

Every village has one or two small shops. A clean and friendly establishment, **Pension Amatea** (☎ 92 92 84; r per person 4000 CFP, with half board 6500 CFP) is also the only place on Tahuata that serves food (although you'll have to reserve in advance). Marguerite, the owner, can help arrange any activity as well as transportation.

The **Te Pua O Mioi** (☎ 92 92 19), the communal *bonitier*, runs a Vaitahu-Atuona (Hiva Oa) ferry service on Tuesday and Friday (4000 CFP return). It departs at about 6.30am from Tahuata and usually returns at around noon on Tuesdays and 3.30pm on Fridays from Atuona. **Pension Amatea**

(☎ 92 92 84) can help arrange passage with private *bonitiers*.

It costs between 22,000 and 28,000 CFP to charter a boat between Vaitahu or Hapatoni and Atuona (Hiva Oa). The *Aranui* and *Taporo VI* stop at Tahuata.

A 17km track, accessible by 4WD vehicles, crosses the island's interior to link Vaitahu with Motupu. It costs 15,000 CFP for one day's hire with driver. Hapatoni is less than 15 minutes from Vaitahu by speedboat. It costs about 6000 CFP to hire a boat between Vaitahu and Hapatoni return, and 7000 to 10,000 CFP between Vaitahu and Hanahevane Bay.

FATU HIVA

pop 631 / area 80 sq km

Fatu Hiva is the island of superlatives: the most remote, the furthest south, the wettest, the lushest and the most authentic. It was also the first in the archipelago to be seen by the Spanish navigator Mendaña, in 1595. He christened it Santa Magdalena after the saint whose day it was.

With no landing strip and only poorly serviced by the *bonitiers* from Hiva Oa (75km), Fatu Hiva's untouched paradise remains, well, untouched. The phallic skyline of Hanavave Bay caused it to be named Baie des Verges (Bay of Penises). Outraged, the missionaries hastened to add a redeeming 'i' to make the name Baie des Vierges (Bay of Virgins). At sunset, it is drenched in purple and the surrounding peaks give off bronze reflections; an entrancing spectacle that has intoxicated hundreds of international yachties.

There is a post office in Omoa and an infirmary or first-aid post in both Omoa and Hanavave. There is no bank.

Sights

The red-roofed, white church with its slender spire dominates **Omoa**. Ask someone to take you to the giant **petroglyph** at the edge of the village: it's an enormous fish carved on a block of rock.

Hanavave is on the seashore, at the mouth of a steep-sided valley leading into the **Baie des Vierges**, a favourite of passing yachties. You can walk (four hours) or ride to the bay from Omoa along the island's only track. It's not particularly difficult except for the climb to the pass separating the two valleys.

Sleeping & Eating

Apart from the *pensions*, eating options on Fatu Hiva are limited to a few small grocers' shops. The following *pensions* are in Omoa.

Chez Lionel Cantois (☎ /fax 92 81 84; s/d/bungalow 4500/6000/8500 CFP) Beside the river in the middle of a beautiful tropical garden it has one well-equipped bungalow with bathroom (hot water) or rooms in the owner's house. Meals can be arranged.

Pension Heimata (☎ 92 80 58; half/full board per person 4000/5500 CFP) This place has two well-kept rooms with shared bathroom (with cold water).

Getting There & Away

Fatu Hiva is the most difficult island to get to in the Marquesas. Try the *Aranui* and the *Taporo VI*. In Atuona on Hiva Oa it's possible to charter a private *bonitier* or to hop on the one that takes the school children home during school holidays; inquire at the **mayor's office** (☎ 92 73 32) in Atuona. To charter a *bonitier*, call **Leo Rohi** (☎ 92 76 57) in Atuona or on Fatu Hiva contact **Joel Coulom** (☎ 92 81 17) or **Xavier Gilmore** (☎ 92 81 38). Expect to pay at least 45,000 CFP for the whole boat return trip (including the boat's return even if you are not on it).

Getting Around

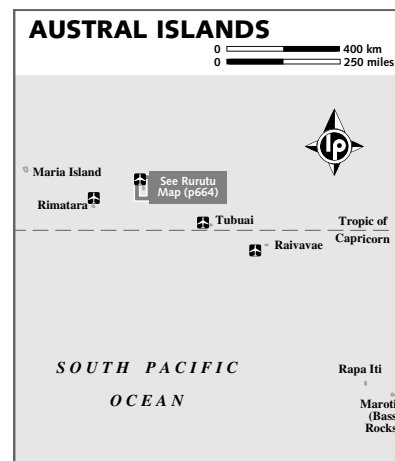
The only dirt road is 17km long and links Hanavave with Omoa. As it is impassable in wet weather, journeys between villages are often by motorised *piroque*.

Ask at your *pension* about renting a 4WD; expect to pay 12,000 CFP a day with driver.

On Fatu Hiva, speedboats have not yet ousted the traditional outrigger canoes, which take three to four passengers. The lone concession to modernity is the low-powered outboards. Expect to pay 6000 to 7000 CFP between Omoa and Hanavave; ask your *pension* for information.

AUSTRAL ISLANDS

The Australs are like tropical island impostors; they do *look* warm. Coconut palms line the turquoise coasts and bananas flourish alongside vast taro fields. Don't let it fool you. Unless you arrive here in



the months between December and April, you'd better have a couple of sweaters and some warm socks in your bag. You won't need any air-con down here and the climate is perfect for activities such as hiking and cycling.

Polynesian culture is alive and well in this remote corner and this is a great place to meet local people, eat healthy meals and settle into a quiet, yet sometimes chilly, island rhythm. The archipelago is remarkably varied, from the limestone caverns of Rurutu to the Bora Bora-like lagoon of Raivavae to the fertile slopes and windy bays of Tubuai. Tourism is developing, but at a pace that is well managed by the proud inhabitants.

Transport

Air Tahiti flies to Rurutu and Tubuai about four times weekly in the low season and five times weekly in the high season. One-way fares are Tahiti–Rurutu from 19,000 CFP, Tahiti–Tubuai from 21,000 CFP, Tahiti–Raivavae from 24,000 CFP, Rurutu–Tubuai from 9500 CFP and Tubuai–Raivavae from 9500 CFP. Rimatara had completed building an airstrip at the time of writing but no flights had yet been scheduled. Getting to Rapa Iti, over 1000km south of Tahiti, is a real adventure.

The cargo ship *Tuhaa Pae II* does three trips a month to the Australs and accepts passengers. For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

RURUTU

pop 2015 / area 36 sq km

A magical island of migrating whales, abundant vegetation, limestone caves and smiling faces, Rurutu is the gem of the Australs. It's unlike the high islands of other archipelagos of French Polynesia in that it is not an extinct volcanic cone but a *makatea*, a massive chunk of coral reef that was lifted up to form an island. Because of this, the topography is startlingly different: sheer cliffs of pockmarked coral rise up around the coast, sometimes housing giant caverns filled with ferns and stalactites. There is a handful of ancient *marae*, some well preserved, and the locals will proudly tell you about their myths and history. A continuous reef that is rarely more than a stone's throw from the shoreline fringes the island, so there's no lagoon as such. Even so, there are more beaches here than most islands in French Polynesia, and the sand is not the yellow-white of Bora Bora's or Mo'orea's beaches, but a bright white of bleached coral.

Orientation & Information

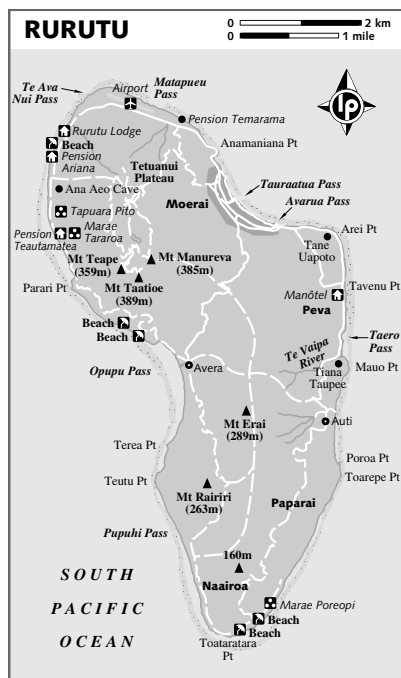
Of the three main villages, Moerai is the largest. It is 4km south of the airport and has the cargo-ship dock, a post office with an Internet connection (220 CFP for 15 minutes), a Banque Socredo and a few small shops. About one-third of the scenic 36km road around the island is sealed.

Sights & Activities

Moerai has a picturesque little **Protestant church** dating from between 1865 and 1872. French Administrator Éric de Bisschop, the island's most famous resident, who dedicated himself to perilous voyages in unsuitable craft, is remembered by a simple **gravestone** in the cemetery.

Migrating whales come close to shore between July and October. Watch from the roadside observation platforms or swim with the whales on a diving trip with the **Raie Manta Club** (☎ 96 84 80; half-day per person 10,000 CFP).

Drive or cycle (it's *very* hilly) around the island to see the evidence that Rurutu began life as an upthrust reef. Going clockwise from Moerai, pass the whale-watching tower near **Arei Point**, which has one of Rurutu's impressive elevated reef cliffs, then



climb inland and drop back to the coast at the village of **Auti**. The road then runs along what was once the ancient lagoon bottom; the range of hills to the west is the old barrier reef. Near **Toataratara Point**, the southern tip of the island, are some lovely **beaches** and the small **Marae Poreopi**.

After climbing north then dropping into pretty **Avera** village the road passes the remnants of once-extensive **Marae Vitarua**. About 1km further, the huge **Ana Aeo Cave** has abundant stalactites and stalagmites. The road passes **Are Taofe**, a coffee house where you can taste and buy the local distinctive coffee. A **whale-watching tower** is on the outskirts of Moerai.

The gentle slopes of the island's interior are perfect for **walking**; it's easy to climb the three highest peaks, Taatioe (389m), Manureva (385m) and Teape (359m).

Sleeping & Eating

You can't go wrong on Rurutu; every option has something special. Airport transfers are free for guests and, unless otherwise mentioned, credit cards are not accepted.

Manôtel (☎ 93 02 26; manotel@mail.pf; s/d/tr bungalows 6000/6500/7000 CFP, half/full board per person 3000/5500 CFP) This place is in the Peva area on the east coast, near Moerai. There are four clean, very pretty bungalows with fan, bathroom and terrace, across the road from a long stretch of beach. The garden is blooming with colours and the welcome is charming.

Rurutu Lodge (☎ 94 02 15; rurutulodge@mail.pf; s/d bungalows 8500/14,000 CFP; ☎) This place in the northeast of the island is the biggest and most upmarket on Rurutu, recently acquired and given a complete remodel by the owners of the Raie Manta Dive club. You won't find as much of a connection with the locals here but it is beautifully designed with authentic Polynesian detail, has a swimming pool, tennis courts, flower-filled gardens and a decent beach. Credit cards are accepted. There's a two-night minimum.

Pension Ariana (☎ 94 06 69; pensionariana@hotmail.com; s/d/bungalows 4000/5000/5500 CFP, half/full board per person 3500/5500 CFP) In a labyrinth of lush gardens and coconut palms, descending to a private beach of white sand, this *pension* has four rooms with shared bathroom in its main building, and seven rustic, colourful bungalows with private bathroom. Cackling Ariana is a likable character who keeps her staff and her guests in good order. It's also in the northeast of the island.

Pension Teautamatea (☎ 93 02 93; pension.teautamatea@free.fr; s/d with half board 7500/12,000 CFP) There are six extremely clean rooms at this excellent *pension*, four with bathroom. The setting is enchanting: a coconut plantation (in which Marae Tararoa is located) stretches behind the building and you only have to cross a track to get to the beach. It's in the island's west.

Snack Chez Paulette (dishes 1000 CFP) The only snack place on the island, but it's a good one. It has no sign and is hidden behind a gate right across from the boat quay in Moerai. Regular snack fare is offered plus a few extras such as stuffed bell peppers and a luscious chocolate cake.

Getting Around

Most pensions rent bicycles for about 1000 to 1600 CFP a day. Pension Temarama also rents a 4WD for 9000 CFP for eight hours.

RAIVAVAE

Often cited as one of the most beautiful islands in the Pacific, Raivavae (rye-vie-vie) has a lagoon that rivals that of Bora Bora's, a mountainous interior dominated by square-topped Mt Hiro (437m) and five quiet, colourful villages full of flowers. The airstrip opened in 2001 and this somniferous paradise has yet to be discovered or exploited in any way by the tourist industry. That said, there really isn't that much to do once you've been around the island and visited the lagoon. The quay is at Rairua as is a post office, infirmary and gendarmerie. There are little stores everywhere along the coast road: these are well stocked with canned goods but there is little produce available. For fish you'll need to contact the local fisherman.

Most of Raivavae's *marae* have been destroyed to create taro fields, used as foundations for houses or simply been forgotten in the bush. **Marae Paomaovao**, across the street from the airport, gets periodically cleared but it's not always visible if it hasn't been.

Raivavae is most famous for its two giant stone *tiki*, now in museums on Tahiti. Legend states that a third *tiki*, the son of the two giant ones, leapt from the boat when it was being taken away with its parents and now lies on the bottom of the lagoon near the boat quay. So far there is no solid evidence as to whether this third *tiki* really exists. The only verifiable remaining *tiki* stands neglected and overgrown in a private garden just to the west of Mahanatoa.

All *pensions* offer excursions to *motu* (2000 to 6000 CFP), Mt Hiro (2000 CFP) plus a free tour of the island by car and free bikes for stays of more than three days. You'll get laughed at if you ask about credit cards. Offering two clean coconut-thatched bungalows on one of Raivavae's best beaches, **Tama Resort** (☎ 95 42 52; r or bungalow with half/full board per person 8000/10,000 CFP) is a solid option. The owners at well-kept **Chez Linda & Nelson** (☎/fax 95 44 25; s/d with half-board 7000/13,000 CFP) just might be the friendliest in the world. At the time of research the place had just three rooms with shared bathroom, but four Polynesian-style bungalows were under construction. **Pension Moana** (☎/fax 95 42 66; s/d/t 2500/4000/5000 CFP, half/full board per person 3000/5000 CFP) sits on a fantastic and secluded peninsula. It has three simple rooms.

Grandma cooks up plenty of local treats for guests and is a respected hat weaver.

Tuhaa Pae II sails by about twice a month.

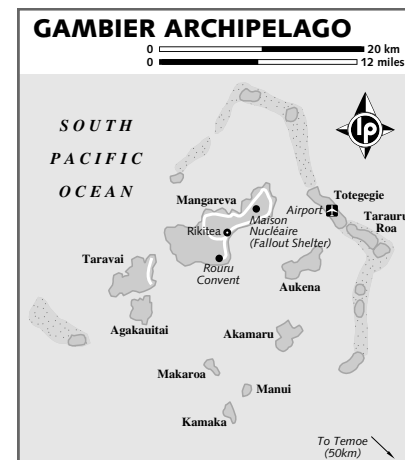
THE GAMBIER ARCHIPELAGO

Yep, this is about as close as you can get to the ends of the earth. The most remote of the French Polynesian island groups, the Gambier Archipelago lies at the extreme southeast end of the long arc of the Tuamotus. On a map the islands appear to be a part of the Tuamotu atolls, but in fact these are high islands that are entirely different from their neighbours. Well to the south, the islands' climate is relatively mild and in winter it can actually get cool.

The few tourists that make it out this way rarely leave disappointed. The surprising landscapes of the archipelago offer a condensed version of the entire country: rocky peaks, a lagoon clear as glass, white-sand islets and beaches, thriving coral, not to mention a fascinating history and plenty of interesting monuments. If only it wasn't so darned expensive to get here...

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

A 90km coral barrier protects the wide lagoon. Twenty-five *motu* are dotted along its northern edge and three passes lead into



the lagoon. Ten volcanic high islands are scattered in the lagoon but all but a handful of people live on Mangareva, the largest island.

Gambier Islands time is one hour ahead of Tahiti time. Rikitea, the town on Mangareva, has shops and a post office.

TRANSPORT

Air Tahiti (☎ 97 82 65) flies to the Gambier Archipelago from Pape'ete (from 56,000 CFP return) about once a week.

From Tahiti, the cargo ships *Nuku Hau* and *Taporo V* sail via the eastern Tuamotus to the Gambier Archipelago about every three weeks. For more on travelling by cargo ship, see p676.

The airport is on Motu Totegegie, on the northeastern side of the lagoon. A communal ferry from Mangareva meets every flight; the journey takes 45 minutes and costs 500 CFP.

Pension owners can organise island tours by boat and visits to the major sites. On Mangareva there is a small network of walking tracks. It's possible to bike the 23km around the island but parts are very steep.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the upper part of Rikitea, on the slopes of Mt Duff (441m), the **Cathedral of St Michael**, built between 1839 and 1848, is the ultimate symbol of Laval's single-minded obsession (see p583 for more about Laval). It can accommodate 1200 people – several times today's population! Built on the site of Mangareva's greatest *marae*, the cathedral has twin blue-trimmed towers and an altar decorated with mother-of-pearl.

Other Laval constructions include the coastal **watchtowers & turret**, the sole remains of the 'palace' he built for the island's last king. **Rouru Convent** once housed 60 Mangarevan nuns, although it's said Laval would hide every woman on the island in the convent whenever a whaling ship docked. An overgrown path leads uphill to the convent, passing a hollowed-out rock pool known as the **Queen's Bath**.

On the north coast is the rusting ruin of the **maison nucléaire**, a fallout shelter from the 1966–74 atmospheric testing period at Moruroa, 400km away. Islanders were squeezed into this windowless tomb for up to three days at a time; it's no wonder *'faaore*

te atomi' (no nuclear testing) is painted on Mangarevan walls.

SLEEPING & EATING

No-one takes credit cards on Mangareva so you'll need to bring plenty of cash.

Chez Bianca & Benoît (☎/fax 97 83 76; Rikitea; s/d with half board 9500/15,000 CFP, s/d bungalows with half board 15,000/20,000 CFP) This place is 1km from the quay and offers fine views across the bay. The owners are dynamic and helpful and the food has a good reputation. There are three rooms with shared bathroom (with hot water) and four comfortable bungalows with attached bathroom. It is closed every year during the month of June.

Chez Jojo (☎ 97 82 61; r with half board per person 7000 CFP, s/d bungalows with half board 11,000/18,000 CFP) In an enchanting, lagoonside setting, 5km from the quay, this place has two Nordic-looking bungalows and one clean but economical room with shared bathroom in the owner's house. The local-style food is excellent and there are bikes and kayaks for hire.

Tara Etu Kura (☎ 97 83 25; Rikitea; bungalows 6000 CFP) It has a family atmosphere and has one bungalow for one or two people. Breakfast costs 1000 CFP, lunch or dinner 2000 CFP.

Snack Jojo (☎ 97 82 61; Rikitea; dishes 900–1500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Serves reasonably priced fare east of the village.

TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Although the brochures show exotic over-water bungalows, French Polynesia actually has everything from camping and hostel dormitories to five-star accommodation. However, in all categories the balance between price and quality can be discouraging. Expect it to be expensive (for details, see the boxed text, p583), don't necessarily expect to get what you've paid for, and enjoy the other aspects of French Polynesia.

Air-conditioning's often not supplied, even in some quite expensive places, but the night breeze means you can usually live without it. Many cheaper places don't supply towels or soap.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Tahiti Beach Press* is the weekly English-language tourist paper that includes some local news coverage. If you read French, there are two Tahitian dailies, *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti* and *La Dépêche de Tahiti*.
- There are about 10 independent radio stations that broadcast music programmes with news flashes in French and Tahitian along with the occasional interview. Among the best-known stations are Tiare FM (the pioneer nongovernmental radio station), Radio Bleue, Radio Maohi, Te Reo o Tefana (a pro-independence station), Radio 1, NRJ and RFO-Radio Polynésie.
- The video format in French Polynesia is Secam, but videos made for tourists are generally also available in PAL and NTSC.
- French Polynesia uses 220V, 60Hz electricity, although some deluxe hotels may have 110V supply for electric shavers. Sockets are French-style, requiring a plug with two round pins.
- French Polynesia follows the international metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Credit cards are welcome at luxury resorts, but many midrange places take cash only; budget places rarely take credit cards. The prices quoted in this chapter include taxes, but many places will quote you pre-tax prices and the add-ons might horrify you. We have rounded prices to the nearest 100 CFP, so use quoted prices as a guide only and be ready for an increase in taxes (which seems to happen every few years). The *taxe de séjour* (accommodation tax) is charged per person per night and can really add up for families.

Camping & Hostels

There are camping options springing up around French Polynesia, but generally it's a matter of guesthouses having areas where you can pitch your tent and allowing use of the facilities; you'll pay anywhere from around 1000 CFP to 2500 CFP per person.

Camping is possible on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Bora Bora, Maupiti, Rangiroa, Tikehau and Mataiva. You may need to rethink camping if it's raining too hard. Also make sure your tent is mosquito-proof or lather yourself in repellent. Some guesthouses have dorm beds ranging from 2000 CFP to 3500 CFP per person per night.

Hotels

There is a glut of midrange hotels on the more touristy islands, but on the more remote islands it's sometimes all (five-star glamour) or nothing (rudimentary *pensions*). Most midrange places are well situated and more comfortable than the *pensions*, and there's usually a restaurant on site. You'll typically pay from around 10,000 to 40,000 CFP per night for a bungalow.

Pensions

Pensions are a godsend for travellers who balk at the prices (and gloss) of the big hotels. These little establishments, which are generally family affairs, are a great way to meet locals and other travellers. Brace yourself for cold showers, lumpy pillows and thin walls, but lap up the charm, interesting discussions and artistic touches that are often part and parcel of the *pension* experience. Many *pensions* have local-style bungalows, which usually have a quaint homemade feel to them (generally because they are homemade!); some of the more upmarket *pensions* have very comfortable versions of the bungalow.

Many *pensions* offer (and sometimes insist upon) half board (or *demi-pension*), which usually means breakfast and dinner. It can cost anything from 4500 to 9000 CFP per person per day, although prices vary widely from island to island. Young children are often allowed to stay for free, and children up to about 12 usually pay half price.

Think ahead in terms of money, as most *pensions* do not take credit cards.

Resorts

If you are ever going to pamper yourself silly, French Polynesia is a great place to do it. The sumptuous luxury hotels often manage to blend their opulent bungalows into the natural setting. Some of the top hotels are on isolated *motu*, and can only be reached by boat. Four- and five-star hotels

are found on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Ra'iatea, Taha'a, Rangiroa, Hiva Oa Manihi and Nuku Hiva. You can expect restaurants, bars, a swimming pool, a shop or two and a well-organised activities desk. Most of the bigger hotels put on a Polynesian dance performance, often with buffet meal, a few times a week. Glass-bottomed coffee tables, which look straight down into the lagoon, have become standard features of the over-water bungalows. The prices are just as dazzling: expect to pay from 45,000 to 150,000 CFP a night, not including meals.

ACTIVITIES

French Polynesia's exceptional natural heritage lends itself to a range of leisure activities. Scuba diving and snorkelling are the main activities, but sailing is also very popular. Increasing numbers of surfers are sampling the islands' excellent reef-breaks, while the jagged relief of the high islands makes for some superb walking and horse riding.

Cycling

On many islands it is possible to rent bicycles, which is the perfect way to get around. The rough roads leading into the interior are great for mountain biking, should you decide to bring one with you from home.

Diving & Snorkelling

French Polynesia is a diver's wet dream. The warm, bright waters, the lack of plankton (which ensures water clarity) and the myriad tropical fish will entice you from the shore. Conditions are close to perfect: visibility often reaches 40m and the water's a bathlike 29°C in summer and 26°C in winter, with only 1°C of variation down to 45m. You don't need a wetsuit; unencumbered by neoprene, diving in Tahiti is like sex without a condom. Most dives are only a five- to 15-minute boat trip from the shore.

There are about 25 professional dive centres in French Polynesia. They open year-round, usually daily. All are at least level 1 on the French CMAS scale and most have at least one Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) instructor. Operators are listed under Activities in island sections earlier in this chapter. A single dive typically costs 5500 to 6500 CFP (more for beginners), usually including equipment rental but not necessarily the 8% VAT.

An excellent website to drool over is www.diving-tahiti.com. For more on diving in Tahiti and French Polynesia, see p71.

The coral reefs and coral outcrops that are dotted around the lagoons are perfect for snorkelling. You can join a lagoon tour by boat, hire an outboard-powered boat or just grab your gear and head out to explore the lagoon yourself.

Hiking

The high islands offer superb walks, but the tracks are sometimes unmarked and are hard to follow: a guide is often necessary. Tahiti and Mo'orea are the main islands for walking, but there are also good walks on Ra'iatea, Bora Bora and Maupiti. The Marquesas has huge untapped potential; currently the only popular walking trail is on Nuku Hiva. The ideal time for hiking is May to October. During the rainy season (November to April), the paths can be dangerous and even impassable.

Horse Riding

There are equestrian centres on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Ra'iatea, Huahine and Bora Bora in the Society Islands. Most places offer short jaunts and longer excursions that explore the island interiors. Horses are an important part of life in the Marquesas, and there are various places to rent them, with or without a guide; you can also horse ride on Rurutu in the Australs.

Surfing

Polynesia was the birthplace of *horue* (surfing), and in recent years there has been a major resurgence of local interest. Tahiti in particular has surf shops, board shapers and a local surfing scene. The island is home to Teahupoo, one of the most powerful waves in the world and the home of the Billabong pro competition each year. Tahiti, Mo'orea and Huahine are the three main islands for surfing, but Rangiroa and Tikehau in the Tuamotus also have good surfing spots.

In general, there are good conditions on the north and east coasts from November to April and on the west and south coasts for the other half of the year – but these distinctions are really theoretical. In practice it is the direction of the swells that makes a spot good at any given time.

Access to the shore breaks is generally easy from the coast roads. You may need to find a boat to take you out to the reef-breaks, or resign yourself to a lot of paddling.

For more information on surfing in French Polynesia, check out www.surfing-tahiti.com.

Always check the weather reports and ask the locals about the conditions. Like surfers anywhere else, French Polynesians can be very possessive of *their* waves. If you want to enjoy the surf, observe all the usual surfing etiquette and give way to local surfers.

There are several surf shops in Pape'ete. You certainly don't need a wetsuit in the warm waters of French Polynesia, but a T-shirt or Lycra vest will protect you from the sun. The local surf shops all have body-board equipment as well as shortboards and traditional surfboards.

On Tahiti, the **Tura'i Mataare Surf School** (Map pp592-3; ☎ 41 91 37; surfschool@mail.pf; PK18.3) offers 10 half-day lessons for 27,000 CFP. The courses are run by a qualified instructor and include equipment, transport to the different surfing spots and insurance. They will also do a single lesson for 4500 CFP.

Yachting

Hiring a yacht can be a fine way to explore French Polynesia, and you can choose from a bareboat charter (which you sail yourself) or a cabin on a fully crewed luxury boat. Ra'iatea is the main yachting base in French Polynesia, although there are a number of yacht-charter operations around the islands, with a flotilla of modern monohulls and catamarans. Cruises on a crewed yacht will usually include tour programmes at the stops en route. Dive cruises are also possible. It takes eight to 10 days to explore the Leeward Islands from Ra'iatea.

The following companies offer cruises and charter boats:

Aqua Polynésie (☎ 73 47 31; aquapol@club-Internet.fr) Luxurious 14m catamarans with crewed cruises around the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus. Boat specially equipped for dive cruises. Departures are from Bora Bora, Huahine or Fakarava (Tuamotus).

Bisou Futé (☎ 65 64 97; www.multimania.com/tahiti-charter) This Taha'a-based operation charters boats by the day and offers cruises.

Blue Lagoon Charter (☎ 67 73 48; bluelagoonchart@mail.pf) Based on Bora Bora, this operation offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

Moorings (☎ 66 35 93; www.moorings.com) Twenty different options, including bareboat charters, hire with skipper and host or cabin charters. It's based at Apooiti Marina on Ra'iatea and offers cruises to the Leeward Islands.

Sailing Huahine Voile (☎ 68 72 49; www.sailing-huahine.com) This operation, based at Huahine, has monohulls and offers cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

Stardust Marine (☎ 60 04 85; www.sunsail.com) Based at the Stardust Marina at Ra'iatea, this operation offers bareboat charters, hire with skipper and/or host, and cabin charter. Cruises in the Leeward Islands and the Tuamotus.

Tahiti Yacht Charter (☎ 45 04 00; www.vpm.fr) Catamarans and monohulls; bareboat charter, or hire with skipper and host. Cruises are possible in all the archipelagos. Departs from Ra'iatea and Tahiti.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are usually open between 9am and noon and 2pm and 5pm Monday to Friday. Shops and offices normally open around 7.30am, close for lunch between 11.30am and 1.30pm and then shut around 5pm Monday through Friday. On Saturday, shops are typically open between 7.30am and 11.30am; almost everything (except a few grocery stores and boutiques on more touristy islands) is closed on Sunday. Restaurant hours vary according to the type of food served and the clientele. Most places open around 10.30am, however, and stay open until about 11pm. We have not listed business hours in our reviews unless they differ from these standards. See p829 for public holidays in the region.

CHILDREN

Fire the baby-sitter and bring the kids: French Polynesia is a great destination to explore with children. There are no major health concerns, the climate is good and the food is easy to navigate. Most locals have a number of children themselves and will not be troubled by a screaming child at the next table, should the treasure be throwing a tantrum over dinner. Children are very much a part of public life in Polynesia.

Practicalities

Total-block sunscreen is readily available in French Polynesia, but is very expensive; nappies (diapers) are also available but pricey (1700 CFP for 38 nappies!). The drinking water is completely safe in Pape'ete, on Bora Bora and on Tubuai, but

you may like to buy bottled water anyway, particularly if your child has a delicate stomach; on the other islands you will all be dependent on bottled water.

There are medical facilities everywhere in Polynesia. Mamao Hospital in Pape'ete has a modern paediatric department.

You will have priority when boarding Air Tahiti aircraft. A Carte Famille (Family Card), which costs 2000 CFP, entitles you to significant reductions on some flights (see p676 for details). At hotels and guesthouses, children under 12 generally pay only 50% of the adult rate; very young children usually stay for free.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

French Embassies & Consulates

You will find French diplomatic representation in the following countries:

Australia (☎ 02-6216 0100; www.ambafrance-au.org; 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Canada (☎ 613-789 1795; www.ambafrance-ca.org; 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, ON K1M 2C9)

Chile (☎ 02-470 8000; www.france.cl; Av Condell 65, Casilla 38-D, Providencia, Santiago)

Fiji (☎ 331 2233; Dominion House, Scott St, Suva)

Germany (☎ 69-2063 9000; An der Kochstrasse 6/7, D-10969 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-260 1666; www.ambafrance-ie.org; 36 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Israel (☎ 03-520 8300; www.ambafrance-il.org; 112 Promenade Herbert-Samuel, 61033 Tel Aviv)

New Zealand (☎ 04-384 2555; www.ambafrance-nz.org; Rural Bank Bldg, 13th fl, 34-42 Manners St, PO Box 11-343, Wellington)

UK (☎ 020-7073 1200; www.ambafrance-uk.org; 21 Cromwell Rd, London SW7 2EN)

USA (☎ 202-944 6000; www.ambafrance-us.org; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

Consulates in French Polynesia

Given that French Polynesia is not an independent country, there are no foreign embassies, only consulates. Canada, the USA and Japan are without diplomatic representation in French Polynesia. If you need a US visa the nearest place to inquire about it is Fiji. If you're a Canadian and you lose your passport, the Australian consulate may be able to help.

The following consulates and diplomatic representatives are all on Tahiti.

Australia (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 88 38; fax 41 05 19; c/- Qantas, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 1695, Pape'ete)

Chile (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 89 19; fax 43 61 62; Passage Cardella, Pape'ete BP 952, Pape'ete)

Germany (☎ 42 99 94, 42 80 84; fax 42 96 89; Rue Gadiot, Pira'e BP 452, Pira'e)

Italy (☎ 43 45 01; fax 43 45 07; Puna'auia, Punaruu Valley BP 380 412, Tamauu)

Netherlands (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 49 37, 43 06 86; fax 43 56 92; Mobil Bldg, Fare Ute, Pape'ete BP 2804, Pape'ete)

New Zealand (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 07 47/40; fax 42 45 44; c/- Air New Zealand, Vaima Centre, Pape'ete BP 73, Pape'ete)

October

Carnival Late in the month there are parades throughout the islands with floats decked with flowers.

November

Hawaiki Nui Canoe Race The major sporting event of the year.

All Saints' Day Graves are cleaned and decorated in an explosion of flowers; families sing hymns in candlelit cemeteries on 1 November.

December

Tiare Tahiti Days The national flower is celebrated on 1 and 2 December.

Marquesas Festival A major arts festival at 'Ua Pou, celebrating Marquesan identity.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

French laws concerning homosexuality prevail in French Polynesia, which means there is no legal discrimination against homosexual activity. Homophobia in French Polynesia is uncommon, although open displays of affection in public should be avoided. French Polynesia does feel remarkably heterosexual, given the preponderation of honeymooning couples, but you will meet lots of very camp *mahu* working in restaurants and hotels.

The Tiki Soft C@fé (p602) in Pape'ete is a popular and hip spot for *popaa* gays, as well as those on the straight and narrow.

Te Anuanua o Te Fenua (Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Association of French Polynesia; ☎ 77 31 11) was formed in 1997, and is based on Tahiti.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are getting more popular each year – although the ones on the smaller islands often boast only ancient computers. Most top-end hotels offer Internet access to their guests, and access is fairly straightforward on Tahiti, Mo'orea, Bora Bora, Huahine, Rangiroa and Ra'iatea. You'll generally pay around 1000 CFP per hour.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Useful generalist English-language sites include the following:

la Orana (www.laorana.com) Off-beat site with information on everything Tahitian.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Provides summaries on travelling to most places on earth, including the all-important Thorn Three bulletin board, where you can ask questions of travellers who've been to Tahiti recently.

Tahiti Explorer (www.tahitiexplorer.com) Discounts on lodging, customised honeymoon packages and destination descriptions.

Tahiti Nui Travel (www.tahiti-nui.com) Aimed at travel agents, but packed with loads of useful info.

Tahiti Planet (www.tahitiplanet.pf) List of companies, educational institutions and government departments.

Tahiti Tourisme (www.tahiti-tourisme.com) Official Tahiti tourism website in English.

MONEY

The unit of currency in French Polynesia is the Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP), referred to simply as 'the franc'. There are coins of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 CFP, and notes of 500, 1000, 5000 and 10,000 CFP. The CFP was pegged to the French franc, and so is now pegged to the euro. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page.

There are fairly hefty bank charges for changing money and travellers cheques in French Polynesia. You generally pay at least 500 CFP commission on travellers cheques and to exchange cash, although exchange rates do vary from bank to bank, so if you have time, shop around to find the best rate. Given the cost of living in French Polynesia, and the low crime rate, you are better off exchanging larger sums of money (ie, fewer transactions) than smaller amounts. Rates offered on Tahiti tend to be better than those offered on the other islands.

HOW MUCH?

- **Night on a private island:** US\$10,000
- **Burger, fries and a Coke at a roulette:** 1500 CFP
- **Five-island airpass:** 25,000 CFP
- **Dinner for two at a midrange restaurant:** 6000 CFP
- **Simple bungalow with fan:** 60,000 to 80,000 CFP per night

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 1.50 CFP
- **1L bottled water:** 100 CFP
- **Bottle of Hinano:** 200 CFP
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 2000 CFP
- **Plate of poisson cru:** 1000 CFP

TELEPHONE

Public phone boxes are found even in surprisingly remote locations, and all use the same phonecards. Phonecards can be bought from post offices, newsagencies, shops and some supermarkets. Phonecards are available in 1000, 2000 and 5000 CFP denominations.

There are no area codes in French Polynesia. Local phone calls cost 33 CFP for four minutes at normal tariff rates. The rates for inter-island or inter-archipelago calls are more expensive (33 CFP a minute inter-archipelago).

Most phone boxes have an information panel that explains, in French and English, how to make overseas calls. If you have any difficulty, call **information** (☎ 3612).

If you want to make a reverse-charge call, ask for *un appel payable à l'arrivée*.

TIME

Tahiti (and neighbouring islands) is 10 hours behind GMT. The Marquesas are half an hour ahead of the rest of French Polynesia (noon on Tahiti is 12.30pm in the Marquesas) but check flight schedules carefully: Air Tahiti departures and arrivals for the Marquesas may run to Tahiti time. Gambier Archipelago time is one hour ahead of Tahiti time; when it's noon on Tahiti, it's 1pm in the Gambiers.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA

The main tourist office is the **Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre** (Map pp598-9; ☎ 50 57 10; www.tahiti-manava.pf; Fare Manihini, Blvd Pomare; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & public holidays) in the centre of Pape'ete. This office has information about the whole of French Polynesia, and has a helpful staff. The more touristy islands generally have some sort of tourist office or counter, but they vary widely in usefulness and dependability.

For information before you leave home, contact **Tahiti Tourisme** (☎ 50 57 00; www.tahiti-tourisme.com; Immeuble Paofai, Batiment D, Blvd Pomare, Pape'ete).

Overseas representatives of Tahiti Tourisme include the following:

Australia (☎ 02-9281 6020; www.traveltotahiti.com.au; 12 Ann St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010)

Chile (☎ 02-251 2826; tahiti@cmet.net; Av 11 de Septiembre 2214, OF-116, Casilla 16057, Santiago)

France (☎ 01 55 42 64 34; tahititourisme@voyage.tahiti.com; 28 Blvd Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris)

Germany (☎ 69-97 14 84; fax 69-72 92 75; Bockenheimer Landstr 45, 60325 Frankfurt/Main)

Italy (☎ 02-66 980317; fax 02-66 92648; Piazza Caiazzo 3, 20 124 Milan)

New Zealand (☎ 09-368 5362; www.tahiti-tourisme.co.nz; Lvl 1, Studio 2A, 200 Victoria St West, Auckland)

Singapore (☎ 6733 4295; pl_holdings@pacific.net.sg; c/- Pacific Leisure Holdings Pte Ltd, 321 Orchard Rd, 09-01 Orchard Shopping Centre, Singapore 238 866)

USA (☎ 310-414 8484; tahitilax@earthlink.net; 300 Continental Blvd, Suite 160, El Segundo, CA 90 245)

VISAS

Everyone needs a passport to visit French Polynesia. The regulations are much the same as for France: if you need a visa to visit France then you'll need one to visit French Polynesia. Anyone from an EU country can stay for up to three months without a visa, as can Australians and citizens of a number of other European countries, including Switzerland.

Citizens of Argentina, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand (NZ), the USA and some European countries can stay for up to one month without a visa. Other nationalities need a visa, which can be applied for at French diplomatic missions. Visa regulations for French Polynesia can change at short notice, so check with a travel agent shortly before departing.

Apart from permanent residents and French citizens, all visitors to French Polynesia need to have an onward or return ticket.

Visa Extensions

Travellers who must have a visa, or those who have a one-month exemption and wish to extend their stay, should contact the **Police aux Frontières** (Frontier Police; Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 40 74; pafport@mail.pf; fa'a airport ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri; Pape'ete ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), at Faa'a airport and next to the Gie Tahiti Manava visitor information centre in Pape'ete, at least one week before the visa or exemption expires. An extension is for a maximum of two months, and incurs a fee of 3000 CFP.

Stays by foreign visitors may not exceed three months. For longer periods, you must apply to the French consular authorities in your own country for a residence permit;

you cannot lodge your application from French Polynesia.

Yacht Formalities

In addition to presenting the certificate of ownership of the vessel, sailors are subject to the same passport and visa requirements as travellers arriving by air or by cruise ship. Unless you have a return air ticket, you are required to provide a banking guarantee of repatriation equivalent to the price of an airline ticket to your country of origin.

Yachties must advise the **Police aux Frontières** (Map pp598-9; Frontier Police; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), next to the visitor information centre in Pape'ete, of their final departure. If your first port of call is not Pape'ete, it must be a port with a gendarmerie (police station): Afareaitu (Mo'orea), Uturoa (Ra'iatea), Fare (Huahine), Vaitape (Bora Bora), Taiohae (Nuku Hiva, Marquesas), Hakahau ('Ua Pou, Marquesas), Atuona (Hiva Oa, Marquesas), Mataura (Tubuai, Australs), Moerai (Rurutu, Australs), Raiura (Raivavae, Australs), Avatoru (Rangiroa, Tuamotus) or Rikitea (Mangareva, Gambiers). The gendarmerie must be advised of each arrival and departure, and of any change of crew.

Before arriving at the port of Pape'ete, announce your arrival on channel 12. You

can anchor at the quay or the beach, but there are no reserved places. Next, you'll need to report to the **Capitainerie** (Harbour Master's Office; ☎ 7-11.30am & 1-4pm Mon-Thu, 7-11.30am & 1-3pm Fri), in the same building as the Police aux Frontières, and complete an arrival declaration.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

French Polynesia is a great place for solo women to explore. Local women are very much a part of public life in the region, and it's not unusual to see Polynesian women out drinking beer together, or walking alone, so you'll probably feel pretty comfortable following suit.

TRANSPORT IN TAHITI & FRENCH POLYNESIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Faa'a International Airport (PPT; ☎ 86 60 61; www.tahiti-aeroport.pf), on Tahiti, is the only international airport in French Polynesia. It's on the outskirts of Pape'ete, about 5km west of the capital. International check-in desks are at the east end of the terminal.

PACKAGE TOUR PARADISE

French Polynesia lends itself to the package tour. Given the high price of flights to the region, and the often-times astronomical price of accommodation once there, a package tour can work out to be a financial godsend. On the downside, package tours don't leave much leeway to explore at will. Although most tours offer the opportunity to visit more than one island, you will have to prebook one hotel for each destination before departure (meaning do your homework in advance – you can't swap resorts halfway through if you're not happy).

There is a variety of tour packages available from travel agents in all Western countries, and a number of online booking agents also offer special flight-and-hotel deals. If you want more than just a straightforward combo package, then a good travel agent is essential: he or she can negotiate better prices at the larger hotels, handle Air Tahiti bookings for your domestic flights once in French Polynesia, and have your schedule finalised before you arrive. In addition to the traditional travel operators, there are agencies that specialise in diving tours. These packages typically include flights, accommodation, diving fee and diving tours.

Tahiti specialists in the USA include **Tahiti Legends** (☎ 800-200 1214; www.tahitilegends.com), **Tahiti Vacations** (☎ 800-553 3477; www.tahitivacation.com) and **Tahiti Explorer** (☎ 800-781 9356; www.airtahiti.com). Packages for seven nights start at US\$1200 on Mo'orea and US\$2000 on Bora Bora.

In Australia, **Hideaway Holidays** (☎ 02-9743 0253; www.hideawayholidays.com.au) is a respected South Pacific specialist that offers heaps of flight-and-accommodation deals to Tahiti. Seven-night packages from Sydney to Tahiti start at A\$2000.

In the UK, **Sunset Faraway Holidays** (☎ 020-7498 9922; www.sunsetfaraway.co.uk) arranges packages to French Polynesia. Ten-night packages start at £1900 to Tahiti and £2300 to Bora Bora.

A number of international airlines serve French Polynesia. Airline offices in Pape'ete include the following:

Air France (Map pp598-9; ☎ 47 47 47; www.airfrance.com; Rue Largarde)

Air New Zealand (Map pp598-9; ☎ 54 07 47; www.airnz.com; Vaima Centre)

Air Tahiti Nui (Map pp598-9; ☎ 45 55 55; www.airtahitiniui.com; Rue Paul Gauguin)

Aircalin (Air Caledonie International; ☎ 85 09 04; www.aircalin.nc)

Corsair (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 28 28; www.corsair.fr; Blvd Pomare)

Hawaiian Airlines (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 15 00; www.hawaiianair.com; Vaima Centre)

LAN (Map pp598-9; ☎ 42 64 55; www.lan.com; Vaima Centre)

Qantas (Map pp598-9; ☎ 43 06 65; www.qantas.com; Vaima Centre)

Flights go to Tahiti direct from Los Angeles (LA), Honolulu and Auckland (with onward connections to Australia) and to a number of other Pacific islands. Tahiti is a popular stop on round-the-world (RTW) tickets (see p836) and is included in several air passes (see p837).

There is no departure tax within French Polynesia.

ASIA

Air Tahiti Nui operates flights between Japan (Tokyo and Osaka) and Pape'ete. Return flights from Tokyo start at US\$1500. From other parts of Asia, the simplest connection is via Australia or NZ.

A good travel agent in Japan is **No. 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com).

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

All flights from Australia to Pape'ete are via Auckland. In Auckland, Qantas flights connect with either Air Tahiti Nui or Polynesian Airlines for the Auckland-Pape'ete leg. Fares increase considerably in the high season (June to September and over Christmas). From Sydney expect to pay from A\$1200/1550 for a return trip in the low/high season with either Qantas or Air New Zealand.

As in Australia, fares from NZ increase during the high season. From Auckland, return fares start at NZ\$1000/1300 in the low/high season. Both Air New Zealand and Qantas/Air Tahiti Nui offer connecting flights from Pape'ete to LA.

Many Australians choose to travel to French Polynesia on a package tour, for more on this see p673.

OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDS

There are regular connections between French Polynesia and NZ, Fiji, New Caledonia, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Futuna, and Hawai'i. Island hopping around the Pacific is not difficult, but because some flights only operate once a week or every few days you may be faced with some scheduling problems if your time is limited.

SOUTH AMERICA

LAN operates flights between Santiago and Pape'ete; one flight a week has a stopover on Easter Island. Return fares cost from US\$1500.

UK & CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Air New Zealand (from London and Frankfurt) and Air France, Air Tahiti Nui and Corsair (all from Paris) have flights to Pape'ete via LA. Return fares from Paris and Frankfurt start at around €1500; return fares from London start at around £1200 in the low season. From other destinations in Europe the easiest option is to travel to one of these cities and connect with flights to Pape'ete. Discount air-travel ads appear in the UK in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*.

Recommended travel agencies:

Anyway (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; www.anyway.fr) France.

Expedia (www.expedia.com) Germany.

Flightbookers (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.com) UK.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) France.

STA Travel (☎ 01805 456; www.statravel.de) Germany.

Traillfinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk) UK.

Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk) UK.

USA & CANADA

Coming from the USA, you can either fly direct from LA to Pape'ete, or go via Honolulu (there's no difference in the fare). Air New Zealand and Air Tahiti Nui serve this route, and Air France and Corsair flights from Paris to Pape'ete go via LA (Corsair flights are also available via San Francisco). Return fares from LA to Pape'ete range from around US\$800 to US\$1500. If you

are starting your trip in Honolulu, return fares from Honolulu to Pape'ete start from US\$700 in the low season (January to May) and US\$900 in the high season (November to December).

If you are interested in exploring other parts of the Pacific, Air New Zealand also offers an excellent deal that allows four stopovers – Honolulu, Nadi (Fiji), Pape'ete and Rarotonga (Cook Islands) – en route to Auckland. Check with Air New Zealand or your travel agent for ticket options and fares.

There are no direct flights from Canada, so you will need to go via Honolulu or the west coast of the USA. Return fares from Vancouver via LA start from C\$2200 in the low season.

If you want to book your flight and hotel as a package, see p673 for more information. **Tahiti Explorer** (☎ 800-781 9356; www.airtahiti.com) concentrates exclusively on French Polynesian travel, and has loads of information. **Avia Travel** (☎ 800-950 AVIA; www.aviatravel.com) is another respected travel agent that specialises in custom-designed RTW fares.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

Sea

Travelling to French Polynesia by yacht is entirely feasible: you can often pick up crewing positions from North America, Australia or NZ, or in the islands; ask at yacht clubs in San Diego, LA, San Francisco, Honolulu, Sydney, Cairns or Auckland.

It takes about a month to sail from the US west coast to Hawai'i and another month south from there to the Marquesas; with stops, another month takes you west to Tahiti and the Society Islands. Then it's another long leg southwest to Australia or NZ.

For yacht formalities while in French Polynesian waters, see p673.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around French Polynesia is half the fun. Travelling between islands involves flights or boat travel and, thanks to French government financial support, travel to the larger and more densely populated islands is relatively easy and reasonably priced, though getting to the remote islands can be harder.

Air

With the exception of a few charter operations, flying within French Polynesia means **Air Tahiti** (☎ 86 42 42; www.airtahiti.pf) and its associate, **Air Moorea** (☎ 86 41 41; www.airmoorea.com). Air Tahiti flies to 38 islands in all five of the major island groups. Window seats on its modern fleet of high-wing turboprop aircraft offer great views, but for the nervous flyer these flights can be rather hair-raising. Air Moorea is the secondary airline, operating smaller aircraft between Tahiti and Mo'orea and Tetiaroa.

Flight frequencies ebb and flow with the seasons, and in the July–August peak season, extra flights are scheduled. Air Tahiti publishes a useful flight schedule booklet, which is essential reading for anyone planning a complex trip around the islands. If you are making reservations from afar, you can email or call; see the individual island sections for Air Tahiti's island-specific phone numbers. You can pay for flights by credit card at all Air Tahiti offices or agencies.

Note that Air Tahiti and Air Tahiti Nui are different airlines; Air Tahiti Nui is the international carrier, while Air Tahiti operates domestic flights only.

AIR PASSES

Several passes allow you to save on visiting multiple islands: all require you begin your trip in Pape'ete and limit the number of transits through Pape'ete. You are only allowed one stopover on each island but you can transit an island as long as the flight number does not change. Stopping at an island to change flights counts as a stopover.

Passes are valid for 28 days and all flights (except between Pape'ete and Mo'orea) must be booked at the beginning. You can fly either Air Tahiti or Air Moorea on the Pape'ete to Mo'orea sector. Once you've taken the first flight the routing cannot be changed and the fare is nonrefundable. There may be restrictions on which 'colour' flights you can use.

The passes include *Passe Découverte* (Discovery Pass: four Society Islands; adult/child 25,000/15,000 CFP); *Passe Bora Bora* (all six Society Islands; 37,000/21,000 CFP); *Passe Bora Tuamotu* (add three islands in the Tuamotus; 55,000/29,000 CFP); and

Passe Lagons (Lagoons Pass: Mo'orea, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Manihi and Fakarava; 41,000/22,000 CFP). Add the Marquesas (Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa) to any other pass for 51,000/29,000 CFP or the Australs (Rurutu and Tubuai) for 26,000/17,000 CFP. A Marquesas and Australs extension to cover all four islands costs 71,000/40,000 CFP.

Limited flights (blue or white) are offered through a *Passe Bleu Découverte* (Blue Discovery Pass: Mo'orea, Huahine and Ra'iatea; 16,000 CFP) and a *Passe Bleu* (Blue Pass: add Bora Bora; 22,000 CFP). There are no children's fares and Mo'orea must be your last visit.

REDUCED-FARE CARDS

Air Tahiti offers several cards that let you buy tickets at reduced prices, depending on whether the flight is classified as blue, white or red.

If you're under 25 a *Carte Jeunes* (Youth Card) and if you're over 60 a *Carte Marama* (Third Age Card) gives you up to 50% reductions (depending on the colour of the flight) and costs 1000 CFP. A *Carte Famille* (Family Card) gives adults up to 50% and children up to 75% discount. It costs 2000 CFP. You need a passport and photos and for the Family Card the kids' birth certificates.

These cards are issued on the spot, only in French Polynesia.

Bicycle

French Polynesia is an ideal region to explore by bike. Distances are manageable, the coast roads are generally flat, traffic is light (outside Pape'ete) and you can travel at your own pace. You can ride around many of the islands in a morning or afternoon. Bicycles can often be rented for about 1500 CFP per day, and many guesthouses have bicycles for their guests, sometimes for free, though you might be riding an old rattler. A mountain bike is ideal for some of the rougher roads and it's even worth bringing your trusty steed with you; they're accepted on all the inter-island ships.

Boat

It's no problem getting from one island to another in the Society group. Between Tahiti and Mo'orea, a number of companies shuttle back and forth daily; the other islands are served at least twice a week.

In the other archipelagos the situation is much more difficult as there are no passenger ships; if time is limited it's best you fly.

You can generally catch a ride on one of the cargo ships, known as *goélettes* (schooners), that transport goods between islands. Island hopping by cargo ship is likely to be memorable, to say the least. You mostly have to travel deck class and provide your own bedding, which you simply unroll on the deck. You're likely to get wet and cold, and possibly seasick. Plus, the ships run to uncertain schedules. But then again, if you wanted to get off the beaten track, you were looking for adventure anyway!

Bonitiers do many of the runs around islands or to nearby islands in the Tuamotus and the Marquesas.

CRUISE SHIP

At the other end of the spectrum from rudimentary cargo ships are luxury cruise ships operating in the Society Islands. These vessels are incredibly stylish and comfortable and offer shore excursions at each stop.

Managed by **Bora Bora Pearl Cruises** (☎ 43 43 03; www.boraborapearlcruises.com), the *Haumana* is a magnificent 36m catamaran that accommodates up to 60 people and does three- or four-day cruises between Bora Bora, Ra'iatea, and Taha'a. The *Tia Moana* and the *Tu Moana*, both also managed by Bora Bora Pearl Cruises, offer seven-day cruises in the Society Islands.

You may see the enormous *Paul Gauguin*, a 320-passenger ship, anchored in Pape'ete. It departs Pape'ete every week for a one-week cruise that includes Ra'iatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora and Mo'orea. Contact **Tahiti Nui Travel** (☎ 54 02 00; www.tahitiniui.travel.pf) for information.

FERRY & CARGO SHIP

It takes between half an hour and an hour to travel between Tahiti and Mo'orea, depending on which company you go with. The car ferries, such as those run by Mo'orea Ferry, are slower than the high-speed ferries, which take only passengers, motorcycles and bicycles. The **Ono-Ono** (Pape'ete ☎ 45 35 35; 1 way/return 1050/2200 CFP) has at least four crossings daily and docks at Cook's Bay rather than Vaiaie, which is handy if you are staying nearby. See the Mo'orea section

(p606) for more information about ferries to/from Mo'orea.

The **Maupiti Express** (Bora Bora ☎ 67 66 69; 1 way/return 2500/3500 CFP) runs a high-speed service between Bora Bora, Taha'a, Ra'iatea and Maupiti.

Vaeau (☎ 41 25 35) operates the Pape'ete-Huahine-Ra'iatea-Taha'a-Bora Bora return trip, leaving Pape'ete on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5pm (the Wednesday trip does not stop at Taha'a). It sets out from Bora Bora on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. The Huahine and Ra'iatea arrivals are in the middle of the night (most guesthouse owners will not pick you up). Reservations are advisable. The office is at Motu Uta, near the *Aranui* office. Take *le truck* 3 from the *mairie*.

Hawaiki Nui (☎ 45 23 24) also travels the Society Islands circuit, and has two departures a week (Tuesday and Thursday at 4pm; per person deck/cabin 2000/5500 CFP); **Aremiti 3** (☎ 74 39 40) sails from Pape'ete on Monday and Friday for Huahine (one-way adult/child 4500/2500 CFP) and Ra'iatea (one-way adult/child 6500/3000 CFP). Tickets can be bought at the quay in Pape'ete.

The small cargo ship **Maupiti Tou A'i'a** (☎ 50 66 71) goes to Maupiti from Pape'ete once a week, with an occasional stop at Ra'iatea and Mopelia. The ship leaves on Wednesday evening, arrives at Maupiti the following morning, and returns to Pape'ete on Friday. The one-way fare is 2500 CFP.

About 10 ships operate through the Tuamotus; routes and fares vary, so it's best to check with the offices for the individual ships. They include the **Dory** (☎ 42 30 55), **Cobia I** (☎ 43 36 43), **Rairoa Nui** (☎ 48 35 78), **Saint-Xavier Maris-Stella** (☎ 42 23 58), **Nuku Hau** (☎ 45 23 24), **Mareva Nui** (☎ 42 25 53), **Vai-Aito** (☎ 43 99 96) and the **Kura Ora** (☎ 45 55 45).

The **Aranui** (☎ 42 62 40; www.aranui.com) and the **Taporo IV** (☎ 42 63 93) go to the Marquesas, stopping in the Tuamotus en route. The *Aranui*, a veritable institution in French Polynesia, does 16 trips a year. The *Taporo IV* runs every 15 days.

Services to the Australs are limited; the **Tuhaa Pae II** (☎ 50 96 09/06; snathp@mail.pf) goes three times a month, stopping at Rurutu and Tubuai on every trip and other islands less regularly. From Pape'ete to Rurutu, Rimatara or Tubuai costs 4046/5664/7789 CFP for deck/berth/air-con cabin; to Raivavae

costs 5832/8164/11,226 CFP. Add another 2800 CFP per day for three meals a day.

All the ships listed as going to the Tuamotus, bar the *Dory*, go to the Gambier Archipelago. The **Nuku Hau** (☎ 45 23 24) sails to the Gambier Archipelago via the Tuamotus (7900 CFP per person deck class, plus 1950 CFP for three meals a day). The **Taporo V** (☎ 42 63 93) sails through the eastern Tuamotus and the Gambier Archipelago once or twice a month.

YACHT

French Polynesia is an enormously popular yachting destination, see p669 for more information.

Bus

French Polynesia doesn't have much of a public transportation system, and Tahiti is the only island where public transport is even an option. The colourful, old *le trucks* (trucks with bench seats in the back for passengers) have been almost entirely replaced now by a less personable, but more modern fleet of proper air-con buses. Buses stop at designated spots (marked with a blue clock) and supposedly run on a schedule – although times are hardly regular.

Car & Scooter

If you want to explore the larger islands of the Society group at your own pace, it is well worth renting a car.

DRIVING LICENCE

Car-hire agencies in French Polynesia only ask to see your national driving licence, so an international driving licence is unnecessary.

HIRE

There are many different car-hire agencies on the more touristy islands, but the prices really don't vary much. For a small car expect to pay between 7500 CFP and 10,000 CFP per day including unlimited kilometres and insurance. Most places also rent vehicles for four- and eight-hour periods at reduced rates. If you only plan to hire a car for one day, eight hours is more than enough time to check out even the largest islands.

At certain times of year (July, August and New Year's Eve), it's wise to book vehicles a few days in advance; on the smaller islands it's best to always book ahead as the number

of cars are limited. You'll need a credit card, of course.

On Tahiti you will find the major international car-hire agencies such as Avis, Budget, Europcar and Hertz. On other islands such as Mo'orea, Huahine, Ra'iatea and Bora Bora, as well as on Rangiroa in the Tuamotus, the market is divided up between Avis and Europcar. Smaller local agencies exist on some islands, but the rates are almost as high.

You can hire a car on Rurutu in the Australis, but on the Marquesas, rental vehicles are mainly 4WDs complete with a driver. Rental without a driver is possible only on Atuona (Hiva Oa) and Taiohae (Nuku Hiva).

Avis and Europcar hire scooters on a number of islands. It's a good way of getting

around the small islands, but bear in mind you won't be wearing protective gear, so this is probably not the place to learn to drive a scooter. You'll pay around 6500 CFP a day. After numerous accidents there are no scooters for hire on Tahiti.

ROAD RULES

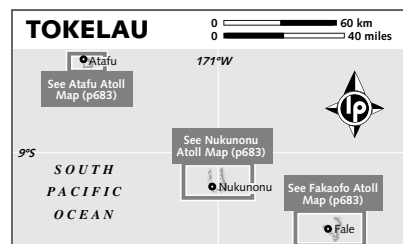
Driving is on the right-hand side in French Polynesia. Although the accident statistics are pretty grim, driving in French Polynesia is not difficult, and the traffic is light almost everywhere apart from the busy coastal strip around Pape'ete on Tahiti. However, the overtaking habits of locals can sometimes get the heart rate up. Beware of drunk drivers at night, and of pedestrians and children who may not be used to traffic, particularly in more remote locations.

Tokelau

If you're into counting off countries, don't leave tiny Tokelau for last. This dot in the Pacific may well be gone, swallowed up by rising seas due to global warming, if you leave it too late.

Tokelau's name is Polynesian for north wind, and it's one of the most isolated places on earth. It takes 20 hours to sail there from its nearest neighbour, Samoa, and you can forget about flying – there's no airstrip. It's largely due to this remote factor that indigenous culture has been preserved on Tokelau to a far greater degree than elsewhere in the Pacific.

Each of Tokelau's three atolls – Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunono – is a ribbon of tiny *motu* (islands) surrounding a lagoon. They're home to a small population of hardy souls who live an almost subsistence lifestyle in very crowded conditions.



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sitting just south of the equator, Tokelau is truly tropical, with an average temperature of 28°C and heavy but irregular rainfall. It's at the northern limit of the South Pacific cyclone zone, so tropical storms are rare but certainly not unknown – the most recent was Cyclone Percy in 2005.

The best months to travel to Tokelau are from April to October. Between November and January, ships are usually full of scholarship students and other Tokelauans living abroad, returning to spend Christmas with their families. December to March is cyclone season, when the trip from Samoa could be rough.

HISTORY

Tokelau's atolls have been populated by Polynesians for about 1000 years, but it wasn't until the 18th century that 'Tokelau' came to exist. A series of wars at this time united these previously fiercely independent atolls. At the end of the wars, Fakaofu had conquered Atafu and Nukunono, bringing them under the rule of the god

Tui Tokelau and creating the first united entity of Tokelau.

Soon afterwards, Tokelau came to the attention of English and US ships sailing by. Whalers frequented the atolls in the 1820s, and in the middle of the 19th century missionary groups began devoting time to the spiritual wellbeing of the Tokelauans. From the 1840s to the 1860s, first Catholic, then Protestant missionaries from Samoa converted the people of the three atolls to Christianity.

Conversion was a mixed blessing. The French missionary Pierre Bataillon transported 500 reluctant Tokelauans to Wallis Island in the 1850s because he feared they would otherwise die of starvation. Then Peruvian slave traders seized about 250 people – half of the atolls' population – in the 1860s. The combined effect of missionaries, slaving and disease reduced Tokelau's population from 1000 to only 200. Desperate to save the remaining people, Tokelauans pleaded with the UK for protection as a British colony, and in 1889 Tokelau was annexed into the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Protectorate (see p734).

In the early 20th century, large numbers of Tokelauans left their homes to work the phosphate mines of Banaba (Ocean Island) in the Gilbert Islands (see p257). After New Zealand (NZ) took over responsibility for Tokelau in 1925, the flow of emigration shifted to Western Samoa (then also a NZ territory). Following Samoa's independence in 1962, Tokelauans relocated to NZ.

In recent years, Tokelau has been moving towards self-government in free association with NZ (like the Cook Islands and Niue), but a referendum in February 2006 failed to result in independence for the tiny territory. Despite this, government and administration has been increasingly based in Tokelau itself in the last decade or so, instead of in NZ and Samoa. Recent improvements in infrastructure have included the creation of a reliable telephone system and direct Internet services.

Tokelau's local government comprises three village councils called the *taupulega* – one on each atoll – made up of the heads of family (including women). Every three years, each atoll elects a *pulenuku* (village mayor) and a *faipule* (atoll representative), who form the Tokelau Executive Council.

POPULATION & AREA

Atoll	Pop	Land	Lagoon
Atafu	600	3.5 sq km	17 sq km
Fakaofu	550	4.0 sq km	50 sq km
Nukunono	450	4.7 sq km	98 sq km

Annually, the position as Tokelau's *ulu o Tokelau* (head of government) rotates amongst the three atolls until the following election. Delegates from each atoll are also elected every three years to serve with the *pulenuku* and *faipule* on Tokelau's 21-member parliament, the General Fono. The number of delegates from each atoll is determined by population density, thus ensuring a representative government based on the varying size of each village.

In early 2005, Tokelau was hit not only by Cyclone Percy but also by a spring tide that inundated the villages of Fakaofu and Nukunono. Homes were under a metre of seawater, and important crops such as coconuts and bananas were hard hit by the winds. Nobody was seriously injured, but the damage was extensive.

THE CULTURE

Tokelau's isolation from the rest of the world, as well as NZ's hands-off approach to its administration, has resulted in *faka Tokelau* (the Tokelauan way) being well preserved. However, the large numbers of Tokelauans living abroad has resulted in an ever-increasing awareness of the benefits of modern *palagi* (Western) culture – whether perceived or real.

Judith Huntsman and Antony Hooper's enormous *Tokelau – A Historical Ethnography* is the definitive text, telling you all you ever wanted to know about Tokelau and its people. With Allan Thomas and Ineleo Tuia, Huntsman has also compiled an interesting collection of tales called *Songs and Stories of Tokelau – An Introduction to the Cultural Heritage*.

Lifestyle

Partly because of the difficulty of travel between the atolls, Tokelau society is still compartmentalised into the three atolls and their (mainly) single village. The one name describes both the atoll and the village

(for example, Atafu Atoll/Atafu Village). *Maopoopo* (village unity) is paramount in Tokelau. Beyond that, each village is divided into two *faitu* – or sides – on a roughly territorial basis. The two sides compete enthusiastically in fishing, action songs, dancing, sports and, most importantly, *likiliki* (village cricket).

The elderly are awarded enormous respect in Tokelau. Each *kau kaiga* (family group) is led by the *matai*, with the three *taupulega* (village councils of elders and *matai*) ordering daily life. Elders are expected to contribute to the community, both through attendance at the *taupulega* and by encouraging younger workers at their tasks.

Each village *taupulega* administers the *aumaga* (village workforce), which gathers fish, harvests crops and maintains village buildings. Almost all males over school age, except for public servants, join the *aumaga*. The female equivalent is the *komiti a fafine* (women's committee), whose job it is to ensure village cleanliness and health.

Under Tokelau's system of *inati* (sharing), resources are divided between families according to need. The *inati* system developed over the centuries out of necessity: in an environment where resources were so scarce, community cooperation was vital. Individualism is not a virtue in these circumstances, nor is it really an option.

Inati still operates – each day, the village's catch of fish is laid out on the beach and apportioned by the *taupulega* – but it is under increasing pressure from the cash economy. Steps have been taken to ensure that employed Tokelauans, mainly public servants, do not receive unfair benefits through this principle of sharing. There are only a dozen

TOKELAU FACTS

- **Capital city:** None
- **Population:** 1600
- **Land area:** 12 sq km
- **Number of atolls:** Three
- **International telephone code:** 690
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** Tokelauan, English and Samoan
- **Greeting:** *Malo ni* (Tokelauan)
- **Website:** www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/tokelau/country/tokelau.html

THE END?

Consisting only of low-lying coral atolls rising to a maximum of 5m, Tokelau faces great risk from global warming. It is predicted that all three atolls will be uninhabitable by the end of the 21st century, though some estimates give only another 30 years. While some Tokelauans regard these predictions as overly dramatic, others foresee the end of their 1000-year-old history. See p66 for more on the issue of global warming.

police officers in Tokelau, and no imprisonment system. In Tokelau's closely knit society, punishment takes the form of public rebukes, fines or labour.

Modern Tokelauan society survives due to foreign aid from NZ, which pumps in NZ\$9 million per year (or NZ\$5500 per head), swamping the gross domestic product of NZ\$1.5 million. Most revenue comes from fishing licence fees, copra, handicrafts and stamps; interest from an international trust fund complements these earnings. Tokelau's isolation adds to the country's financial woes – telecommunications and transport cost 25% of the yearly budget. All medical supplies, equipment and many foodstuffs are imported.

The public service is the main source of regular income for Tokelauans; these jobs are rotated among villagers and a village tax is imposed on wages. The other major source of income is from the *aumaga*. Payment for *aumaga* work, which was traditionally unpaid, provides an income for young Tokelauans who would otherwise have to look for work overseas. Remittances from Tokelauan relatives living away from home is another source of income.

While each atoll has a hospital, it's a fact of life for Tokelauans that any serious health problem can easily be life threatening – medical supplies are difficult to come by and specialist care is days away in Samoa.

Entertainment on the islands is limited to community discos on the three atolls. Expect lots of 'cold stuff' (beer), loud music and dancing. Although gambling for money is illegal, weekly bingo games are extremely

popular with women. Prizes include boxes of washing powder and bottles of shampoo.

Population

Tokelauans are Polynesian, closely related to Tuvaluans, Samoans and Cook Islanders. The liberal sprinkling of European surnames is the legacy of some enthusiastic whalers and beachcombers of the late 19th century.

Tokelau's islands are cramped beyond belief, even though emigration has relieved some of the population pressure. Tokelauans are mainly crowded into three small villages, each perched on the main *motu* of each atoll. Around 400 people live on Fakaofu's tiny (4-hectare) Fale Island; in fact, Fale's population density is one of the highest in the Pacific, and is such that the island's numerous *puaka* (domestic pigs) have been squeezed out to reside on the reef rather than on land. Fakaofu's second islet, Fenua Fala, has a smaller cluster of homes with a hospital, school and church.

Land shortages have long forced emigration from Tokelau, and most of the country's people live overseas, predominantly in Samoa, NZ and Australia. Almost 6500 Tokelauans live in NZ – four times as many as in Tokelau itself. They have maintained affinity and allegiance with their familial atolls and actively retain the language and culture of their homeland.

SPORT

Tokelauans play similar sports to Samoa and NZ; rugby, netball and *kilikiti* (the Polynesian form of village cricket) are popular. When playing *kilikiti*, each side fields as

many players as are available – on crowded Tokelau that means 50 per side is not uncommon. A shot into the ocean or lagoon is a confirmed 'six'.

RELIGION

Tokelau is a staunchly Christian country – the percentage of the population that does not belong to one of the two main churches is tiny. Sunday is devoted almost entirely to church activities, with time off for a large meal and a midday snooze. If you attend church while in Tokelau, the community will better accept you – and it will give you something to do on Sunday. Work and many activities are forbidden on Atafu and Fakaofu on Sunday; Nukunonu is less strict.

Tokelau's religious composition reflects the arrival of Samoan missionaries of different denominations during the 19th century: Atafu is almost completely Protestant, Nukunonu is largely Catholic, and Fakaofu, where Catholic and Protestant missionaries arrived almost simultaneously, is split between the two faiths. Interdenominational tension is all but unknown on Fakaofu, as it would run contrary to the supreme concept of *maopoopoo*.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, Tokelauans worshipped the god Tui Tokelau – personified in a slab of coral that still stands in the *fale fonu* on Fakaofu. The usual pantheon of Polynesian gods was also acknowledged in Tokelau.

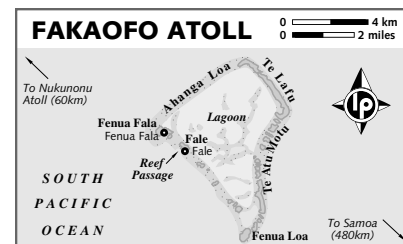
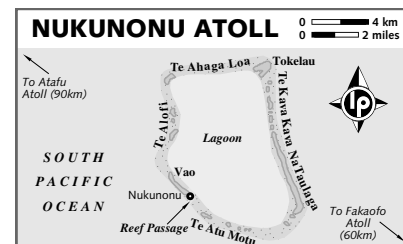
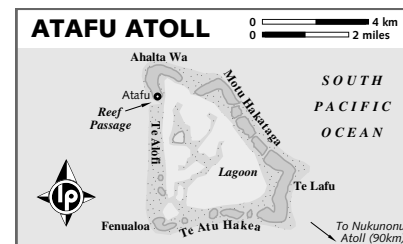
LANGUAGE

Tokelauan is a Polynesian language, closely related to Tuvaluan and Samoan. Because of frequent contact with NZ, most Tokelauans speak some English.

Tokelauan pronunciation is similar to other Polynesian languages, except that 'f' is pronounced as a soft 'wh', and 'g' is pronounced 'ng' (a soft sound) as in Samoan.

Tokelauan basics

Hello.	<i>Malo ni or Taloha</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tofaa.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ea mai koe?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Ko au e lelei.</i>
Please.	<i>Faka molemole.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Faka fetai.</i>
Yes.	<i>lo.</i>
No.	<i>Heai.</i>



ENVIRONMENT

Tokelau may not have an environment to worry about in another few decades – climate change and the associated rise in sea level are the two biggest environmental issues pressing this atoll nation (see the boxed texts, p681 and p66).

More immediate environmental concerns include the overexploitation of some fish and other marine species, as well as its (albeit tiny) forest resources. Due to the country's very limited acreage, waste disposal is also a big problem, as is the improper disposal of chemicals.

Geography

Tokelau's three small atolls lie roughly in a line, 480km north of their nearest neighbour and main link with the outside world, Samoa. The three atolls are separated not only from the rest of the world but from each other – it is 92km between Nukunonu

THE TOKELAUAN FALE

The traditional Tokelauan *fale* (house) has all but disappeared. Houses these days are built with sturdy concrete in the hope that modern materials will withstand cyclones more successfully than the traditional coral pebbles and wood. That said, many such homes were damaged during Cyclone Percy in 2005. With rain run-off from roofs being the major source of fresh drinking water, pandanus leaves have given way to corrugated iron as a roofing material.

More traditional Atafu still has a very small number of traditional *fale*, partly because that atoll has a better supply of the excellent building wood, *kanava*.

The largest and most ornate building on each atoll is the church – or three churches in Fakaofu's case. Other community focal points are the village cricket pitch and the *fale fonu* (village hall). One of the newest buildings in the country is Nukunonu's *fale fonu* – until recently this building was little more than a cargo shed but it is now an attractive, traditional *fale* located next to the administrative building. Fakaofu's *fale fonu* is also a traditional open-sided structure, whereas the one on Atafu is raised and enclosed by a wall and windows.

and Atafu, and 64km between Nukunonu and Fakaofu.

The trio are classic coral atolls: thin necklaces of small islets surrounding central lagoons (see p63). The low-lying islands have a maximum elevation of only 5m above sea level, and the land area is tiny, amounting to only 12.2 sq km across the three atolls. None of the 128 islets are more than 200m wide.

Ecology

Like all coral atolls, Tokelau's soil is thin, infertile and holds water poorly. Coconut and pandanus are the most common plant species; *kanava* is a tree popularly used for timber. Bananas, pawpaw, taro, breadfruit and other staple food crops grow on the islands. Migratory seabirds are common visitors to the atolls; otherwise, fauna consists of rats, lizards, poultry and the reef-exiled pigs.

FOOD & DRINK

The traditional method of cooking in Tokelau is the *umu* (earth oven), which will be familiar to anyone who has spent some time in the Pacific; they're most popular on Fakaofu. However, most households cook on kerosene stoves. The traditional diet of fish, *kumala* (sweet potato), breadfruit, taro, pigs and fowl is supplemented by the processed foods which are brought

in roughly every 12 days by cargo ship. Canned meat, also a mainstay of Pacific travellers, is in plentiful supply.

If you're staying with one of the accommodation establishments detailed on below, or with a local family, your food needs will be looked after. Processed food (and other supplies) can be bought from the small village-owned co-op stores on each atoll. Supplies of fresh fish, vegetables and drinking coconuts should be negotiated with someone from the *taupulega*.

As on all coral atolls, fresh water is scarce. The porous coral soil drains quickly, so despite the heavy rainfall there are few groundwater reserves except on Fakaofu. Instead, rainwater is collected from roofs into rainwater tanks. Tank water tends to taste somewhat brackish, perhaps explaining the preference for 'cold stuff' (beer). Coconuts are plentiful, but make sure you have permission before grabbing one to drink from – such resources are limited in Tokelau.

Beer, invariably Samoan and when available, is sold at the co-op stores on Fakaofu and Nukunonu; its sale is strictly rationed on more-traditional Atafu. Tokelau's isolation means that supplies of *hostuff* ('hot stuff'; spirits) and beer can be unreliable. *Kaleve*, made from fermented coconut sap, is also drunk.

TOKELAU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation on Tokelau must be arranged before arrival through the **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) in Samoa. Official places to stay are very limited; you may be able to arrange accommodation in a private home but it won't be easy without contacts. Facilities are basic – all that is provided is a bed, meals and a bar.

Nukunonu Atoll has a relative goldmine of options, with two places to stay. **Luana Liki Hotel** (☎ 4140; full board NZ\$50) is a wonderfully friendly place with nine rooms. It is owned by retired teachers Luciano and Juliana Perez, and they will happily organise lagoon outings and snorkelling expeditions inside and outside the reef. The other alternative is one of the three self-catering rooms on

TOKELAU, AT LAST Rowland Burley

It took me nearly two years to get to Tokelau, but it was well worth the wait.

The first problem was communicating with TALO in laid-back Samoa. Emails would sometimes remain unanswered for weeks at a time, and their replies were often sparse at best. But eventually a sailing schedule materialised for the supply ships that make the eight-day trip from Apia around the islands, and I arranged my leave to coincide with one of them. As the months passed, I confirmed the departure date regularly but then, when it was far too late to alter my holiday plans, the sailing was moved forward by several days. I'd just have to wait till next year.

Over the following months, I went through the same painstaking process of finding the ship schedule and booking my leave – although this time I left several days clear both before and after the trip, in case the date changed again. And, of course, change it did, but this time by a whole week! Faced with having to wait another whole year, I eventually managed to scrounge some extra leave, and I was finally set to go.

In Apia, the folk at TALO couldn't have been nicer, and they reassured me that the ship really was still going, although I didn't actually believe it until we pulled away from the wharf. The 24 hours it took to get to Nukunonu would have been fine if the good ship *MV Lady Naomi* had been just a little more stable, but once we arrived, it was just perfect. I spent a whole week exploring the three atolls, with no vehicles and no tourists – the real Polynesia at last.

Rowland Burley is an inveterate traveller who has been to all the world's countries and most of its territories and island groups. Tokelau was one of the very last places he needed to visit, leaving only a couple of remote Pacific and Indian Ocean atolls before he can claim to having been everywhere.

the top floor of the **Fale Fono** (main administration building; ☎ 4139), but visiting officials often use them.

Atafu Atoll has one small **accommodation house** (☎ 2146; fax 2108), which is run by master fisherman Feleti Lopa.

On Fakaofu Atoll there are no official places to stay although TALO might be able to arrange something, should you have the urge to stay there.

If village life is a bit too claustrophobic, and you have a tent, consider moving out to one of the remote uninhabited islets for a quiet retreat. Remember that every single island in Tokelau, big or small, is owned by either a family or a village, and it's important to get permission to visit before you go.

ACTIVITIES

Diving and snorkelling both inside and outside the atolls' lagoons is fantastic. There is almost nothing in the way of search and rescue facilities though, so diving outside the reef should be undertaken with maximum caution. Talk to the locals to find out where the safest diving spots can be found. The nearest compression chamber is so far away (Fiji) that it might as well be on Mars.

Ask the local men if you can accompany them on fishing trips, but be aware that

they are working and won't always be able to accommodate your wishes.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Fakaofu (www.fakaofu.tk) Guide to the chiefly island of Tokelau.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/pacific/tokelau/) Tokelau profile.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/tokelau/country/tokelau.html) NZ government site, with an up-to-date Tokelau homepage.

Nukunonu (www.nukunonu.tk) Specific information about Nukunonu.

Tokelau Council of Ongoing Government (www.tokelau.org.nz) Support for Tokelau's move to self-determination continues, despite the 2006 referendum.

MONEY

The NZ dollar is the official currency, though Samoan tala will sometimes be accepted (for exchange rates see the Quick Reference page). There are no banks in Tokelau.

TELEPHONE

As part of the improved infrastructure necessary for eventual self-determination, Tokelau was connected with the international phone system in 1994.

TIME

Tokelau is 11 hours behind GMT.

TOKELAU TELEPHONES Errol Hunt

While septic tanks are now common in Tokelau, some people still make use of the small huts perched above the lagoon. Such huts serve more than one purpose; they are a common meeting venue, and several men (or women) will gather in the one hut to swap gossip and discuss the busy day's events. This is why they're called 'Tokelau telephones'.

The Tokelau telephones have an obvious drawback. The atolls' lagoons are already under ecological pressure: garbage disposal directly into the lagoon is common (despite education programs encouraging composting and recycling), and the toilet huts add to this waste. Tokelau's telephones will eventually be phased out, their two functions replaced by sewerage tanks and modern telecommunications.

VISAS

The **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822, 71805; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia) in Samoa issues one-month visitor permits for NZ\$30. Accommodation needs to be arranged through TALO prior to arrival in Tokelau and a return ticket to Samoa must be booked. Also, consent must be given by the village *taupulega*.

TRANSPORT IN TOKELAU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting to Tokelau is not something you do on a whim – planning, waiting and keeping your fingers crossed all carry equal weight. And make sure you’ve got sea legs – there’s no airstrip on Tokelau so the only way to get there is by boat or yacht.

Boat

Several ships service Tokelau, with one departure every 12 days or so (usually there are two or three sailings per month) from Apia in Samoa. The Tokelau Administration owns a cargo ship, the *MV Tokelau*, which makes the trip to Tokelau every two or three weeks. In addition, there are larger, dual-purpose passenger/cargo vessels that are hired to make the round trip every month or so. If you have a choice, and are keen on comfort (relatively speaking), go for a hired vessel – they have many more passenger bunks than the one-cabin *MV Tokelau*.

Bookings on these ships are made through the **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822, 71805; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia) in Samoa. Allow plenty of time to process your booking, and be aware that tourists are a lower priority than locals. Also remember that the sailing schedule published by TALO is not set in stone – actual departure dates can vary by more than a week from those originally announced.

The trip to Fakaofu (the closest atoll to Samoa) takes about 20 hours, and travellers have a choice between cabin fare (NZ\$530 return) and deck fare (NZ\$290). In either case there will be plenty of company on the voyage – you’ll be travelling with a boatload of Tokelauans from Samoa and NZ returning home to see their families. The round trip from Apia to Tokelau and back takes about eight days.

There is no harbour on any of the atolls. The ship waits offshore while passengers and cargo are transferred via small boats and dinghies – a hair-raising experience if seas are heavy.

Yacht

Seek advice about the voyage to Tokelau from someone who has been there, and see p842 for more information about sailing in the Pacific.

Tokelau’s atolls are low-lying and make difficult visual targets. There are no harbours and anchoring offshore is not easy, especially in an offshore wind. The sea floor drops off sharply outside the coral reef and the water is too deep for most anchor chains. There is one anchorage beyond the reefs at each atoll, but leave a crew member aboard in case the anchor doesn’t hold. The channels blasted through the coral are shallow and are intended for dinghies only.

If you’re heading to Tokelau on your own yacht, you will still need to apply for a visitor permit (see left).

GETTING AROUND

Inter-island travel is only possible on the ships that leave Apia for Tokelau (left). These ships usually visit all three atolls twice on each voyage. Sailing time is three hours between Fakaofu and Nukunonu, and five hours between Nukunonu and Atafu. Travel between the small islands on an atoll is usually done in a small aluminium dinghy, or by wading if the tide is low enough.

There are only a handful of vehicles in Tokelau.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it’s fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don’t upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – ‘Do the right thing with our content.’

Tonga

Tonga's outstanding natural beauty captivates its visitors – from the picture-postcard beach-scapes you'd expect to find in the South Pacific, to the rainforests perched above soaring cliffs in 'Eua, to the protected waterways of sailing-Mecca Vava'u and the magnificent underwater world throughout its islands.

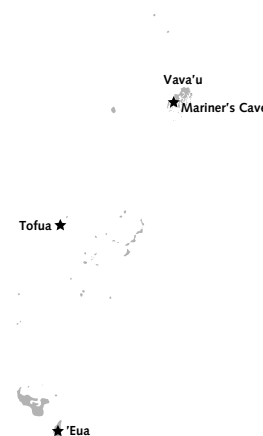
Travellers choose the pace of their adventure in Tonga, mixing slow-paced sun-and-sand holidays with unique and intrepid experiences. Humpback whales migrate to Tonga's warm waters to breed, and travellers circumnavigate the globe to dangle midwater with these mesmerising giants. A bit more planning could see you hiking up Hapa'ai's remote volcano, Tofua, to camp in its crater and stare into its bubbling caldera; kayaking on a multiday, multi-island adventure around Ha'apai or Vava'u; or sailing your charter yacht where the mood takes you around the Vava'u group.

You won't find resorts selling packaged fun and you won't have to try to gain a cultural experience – it's all around. Wherever you are on a Sunday, you can be sure that powerful harmonies will be raising the roof at many local churches.

Despite its rich endowment, Tonga receives – and perhaps only wants – a relatively small number of visitors. For hundreds of years, Tonga has beguiled, charmed and frustrated travellers who have tried to get under the skin of this enigmatic kingdom. It defies sweeping description despite being one of the Pacific's most homogeneous societies. Although the modern world has made its mark, Tonga is still a very conservative country, and one wrestling uneasily with inevitable change.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swim with the humpback **whales** (p718) that come to breed in Tonga's waters every year, or simply watch them in awe
- Hike through **'Eua's** (p705) virgin tropical rainforests to the edge of dramatic cliffs, delve into limestone caves and climb giant banyan trees
- Climb the eerie, uninhabited volcanic island of **Tofua** (p711) and peer into its glowing caldera
- Get the wind in your sails among the kingdom's beautiful islands, particularly around sailing-hub **Vava'u** (p715)
- Duck dive into **Mariner's Cave** (p722) – it's such an unnatural feeling to swim into the unknown – or snorkel in fish soup in **Vava'u** (p715)



THE CULTURE

Tonga is a largely homogenous, church- and family-oriented society. Although on the whole Tongans are open and extremely hospitable, due to cultural nuances, many foreigners feel a bit at arm's length. Gift giving is common.

Respectful dress is considered important in Tonga. Despite the increasing Western influence, modest dress – tops covering the chest and shoulders and skirts reaching below the knees (respectable sleeveless dresses are OK) – is expected in Tonga, though this code is a little more relaxed in Nuku'alofa and to a lesser extent Neiafu. Skimpy shorts (even on men) are considered to be inappropriate and swimsuits should only be worn in resorts or on very isolated beaches.

You'll often see Tongans wearing distinctive pandanus mats called *ta'ovala*. In place of a *ta'ovala*, women often wear a *kiekie*, a decorative waistband of woven strips of pandanus. Men frequently wear a wraparound skirt known as a *tupenu* and women an ankle-length *vala* (skirt) and *kofu* (tunic).

The concept of keeping 'face' is extremely strong in Tonga. Causing someone to lose face is a very serious social transgression, so if a Tongan makes an innocent mistake, do not start waving and shouting about it, or you are likely to cause them far greater anguish than they have caused you.

Population

Tongans make up the vast majority of people in Tonga. There are a few *palangi* (Westerners) expats and a small but significant population of Chinese immigrants.

Tonga's total population is estimated to be around 101,000. Tongatapu has more than 65% of the total population, with around 30% in Nuku'alofa (the island's and the nation's capital).

Despite steady emigration (you'd be hard-pressed to find a Tongan who doesn't have relatives overseas), only Ha'apai and the Niuas suffer from falling populations. Estimates suggest there are as many Tongans living abroad as there are in the kingdom. Tonga is highly dependent on remittances sent by Tongans living overseas; however, support from overseas relatives is decreasing as the next generation of expat Tongans become more detached from their homeland.

RELIGION

Tonga is, on the surface at least, a very religious country. The Free Wesleyan Church (the royal family's church of choice) claims the largest number of adherents, followed by the (Methodist) Free Church of Tonga, the Church of England, the Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and the wealthy and increasingly prominent Mormons.

Many Tongans still believe in the spirits, taboos, superstitions, medical charms and gods of pre-Christian Polynesia.

FAKALEITI

One of the most distinctive features of Tongan culture are *fakaleiti* (men who dress and behave as women), a modern continuation of an ancient Polynesian tradition, known as *fa'afafine* in Samoa and *mahu* or *rae rae* in French Polynesia.

While most *fakaleiti* are probably gay, not all of them are. Many consider themselves ladies and wouldn't think of relating sexually to anyone but a masculine man; yet others are married to women. *Fakaleiti* get away with promiscuity with men on a scale forbidden to biological females, however. Seeing the *fakaleiti*'s open flaunting of sexuality and transvestitism, and their acceptance as part of Polynesian society, it might seem there is no social stigma attached to being a *fakaleiti*. However, although adult *fakaleiti* are accepted, growing up as a *fakaleiti* is not easy. Many are tormented by other children and teenagers and to most Polynesian fathers it's not a great source of pride if their sons turn out to be effeminate.

On Tongatapu, the Tonga Leitis' Association is an active group – note that members prefer to call themselves simply *leiti* (ladies). The association sponsors several popular, well-attended annual events, including the international Miss Galaxy competition in early July which attracts *fakaleiti* and transvestites from several countries. Similarly popular contests are held in Samoa and American Samoa from October onwards.

ARTS

Tongans enjoy a fine reputation for their craftsmanship in woodcarving throughout the Pacific and many excellent examples can be bought in stores, markets or from the roadside. The Tongan gods Tangaloa and Hikuleo are popular subjects. See p58 for more about Pacific carving.

The enormous Ha'amonga 'a Maui trilithon (p703) on Tongatapu is one of the most impressive carved stone structures in Polynesia.

Dance

The most frequently performed traditional dance in Tonga is called the *lakalaka*. The *tau'olunga*, a female solo dance, is the most beautiful and graceful of all Tongan dances. The most popular male dance is the *kailao* – the war dance.

Tapa

Tapa is Tonga's most renowned craft. Along with pandanus weavings, tapa is considered part of the *koloa* (wealth) of Tongan families. See p57 for further information.

LANGUAGE

Tongan is a Polynesian language similar to Samoan. Because of the conquering exploits of ancient Tongans, similar languages are spoken on Wallis Island and Niue. In Nuku'alofa at least, almost everyone can speak English, though a few basic Tongan words are always appreciated.

Tongan basics

Hello.	<i>Malo e lelei.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>'Alu a.</i>
How are you?	<i>Fefe hake?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Sai pe (malo).</i>
Please.	<i>Faka molemole.</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>Malo (aupito).</i>
Yes.	<i>'Io.</i>
No.	<i>Ikai.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The Kingdom of Tonga is made up of 171 islands, scattered across 700,000 sq km of ocean. Geographically Tonga is composed of four major island groups which are, from south to north: Tongatapu, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niuas. The kingdom is situated on the site where the Pacific tectonic

BEST EATING

The Tongan diet consists mostly of root vegetables, coconut products, taro, fresh fruit, pork, chicken and fish, with little seasoning. Tonga's seafood is easy to come by and the delicious and light *ika lahi* (marinated raw fish) must be tried, at least once. Following are Lonely Planet's top Tongan dining experiences:

- Local foodies rave about top-notch Pearl Inn (p701).
- Try a Tongan Feast. Usually they're cooked in an *umu* (underground oven) and accompanied by traditional dance and song.
- Arrive by boat to dine and join the fun at well-loved La Paella (p720).
- Friends Café (p700) has great food, Royal Coffee and a breezy atmosphere (everyone tries it at least once).
- Pay a visit to Mariners Café (p710). After a week in Ha'apai, you'll never savour a pizza in quite the same way.

plate slides underneath the Indo-Australian plate, making Tonga a particularly volatile area renowned for volcanic and earthquake activity.

Ecology

Tonga's national flower is the *heilala*. The most common plant you will see in Tonga is the coconut palm.

Dolphins and migrating humpback whales swim in the waters around Tonga. The humpbacks come from June to November and can often be seen offshore from the major islands.

The only land mammal native to Tonga is the flying fox (fruit bat).

Tonga has surprisingly few birds, but of interest are the *henga* (blue-crowned lorikeet); the *koki* (red shining parrot) of 'Eua; and the *malau* (megapode or incubator bird), found only on the island of Niuafo'ou, but also introduced in recent years to Late Island in Vava'u.

National Parks

Tonga has eight officially protected areas, including five national marine parks and reserves, one national historic park (the

23-hectare Ha'amonga Trilithon Reserve), the 449-hectare 'Eua National Park and the Mt Talau National Park in Vava'u. There are plans to declare Tofua and Kao in Ha'apai as national parks. The whole of Ha'apai is a designated conservation area.

TONGATAPU

pop 69,000 (est) / area 260 sq km

Tongatapu (Sacred South) Island is the landing and launching pad for most activity in Tonga. The majority of the island's population lives in Nuku'alofa (Abode of Love) and its adjoining villages.

Tongatapu faces the islands of Fafā and Pangaimotu, and is partially bordered by Fanga Uta Lagoon. Outside of Nuku'alofa, the island comprises of plots of agricultural land, small villages and plenty of churches.

Most archaeological sights – such as Lapaha and Ha'amonga 'a Maui Trilithon – are found on Tongatapu's eastern side, which also features caves, calm sandy coves, and the airport (in the southeast, see p694). To the

west is the wilder surf coast and the Mapu'a Vaca blowholes.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Friendly Islands Bookshop (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23787; Taufa'ahau Rd) The only bookshop of any consequence in Tonga, with a good selection of newspapers and magazines, paperbacks, travel titles and books about Tonga.

Internet Access

Nuku'alofa has many Internet cafés, including the following:

DataLine Internet Cafe (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27773; Royco Bldg, Fatafehi Rd; per hr T\$2; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Sat) Blank DVDs/discs T\$5/1.30.

Friends Tourist Centre (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26323; Taufa'ahau Rd; per 15min T\$2)

Relax Café (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24444; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds; per 20 min/hr T\$1/2; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Fri, to late Sat) Blank CDs T\$1.50, CD burning T\$2.

Medical Services

Friendly Island Medical Clinic & International

German Dental Clinic (☎ 26797; Vuna Rd, Sopu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3.30-8pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri) Make an appointment.

Pharmacy (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22736, after office hr 27021; jackis@kalianet.to; Wellington Rd; ☎ 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Consultations T\$20.

Vaiola Hospital (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23200; Taufa'ahau Rd) Recommended only for emergencies.

Village Mission Pharmacy (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27522; 'Unga Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat, medical clinic ☎ 2.30-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri) Central pharmacy, well-stocked with sunscreen, insect repellent, contact-lens solution, baby formula, gastrolyte, earplugs and the like. On-site medical clinic and Fa's Beauty Spa (waxings and beauty treatments).

Money

ANZ (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24944; www.anz.com/tonga; cnr Salote & Railway Rds) There's an ATM inside bank.

MBF (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24600; Taufa'ahau Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Western Union (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24345; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) GlobalEx money transfers. Shortest queues for currency exchange and open on Saturday morning.

Westpac Bank of Tonga (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23933) Two branches have ATMs and open on Saturday morning.

Post

Post office (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21700; cnr Taufa'ahau & Salote Rds) This office has a poste restante window next to the main entrance; address to: Post Restante, GPO,

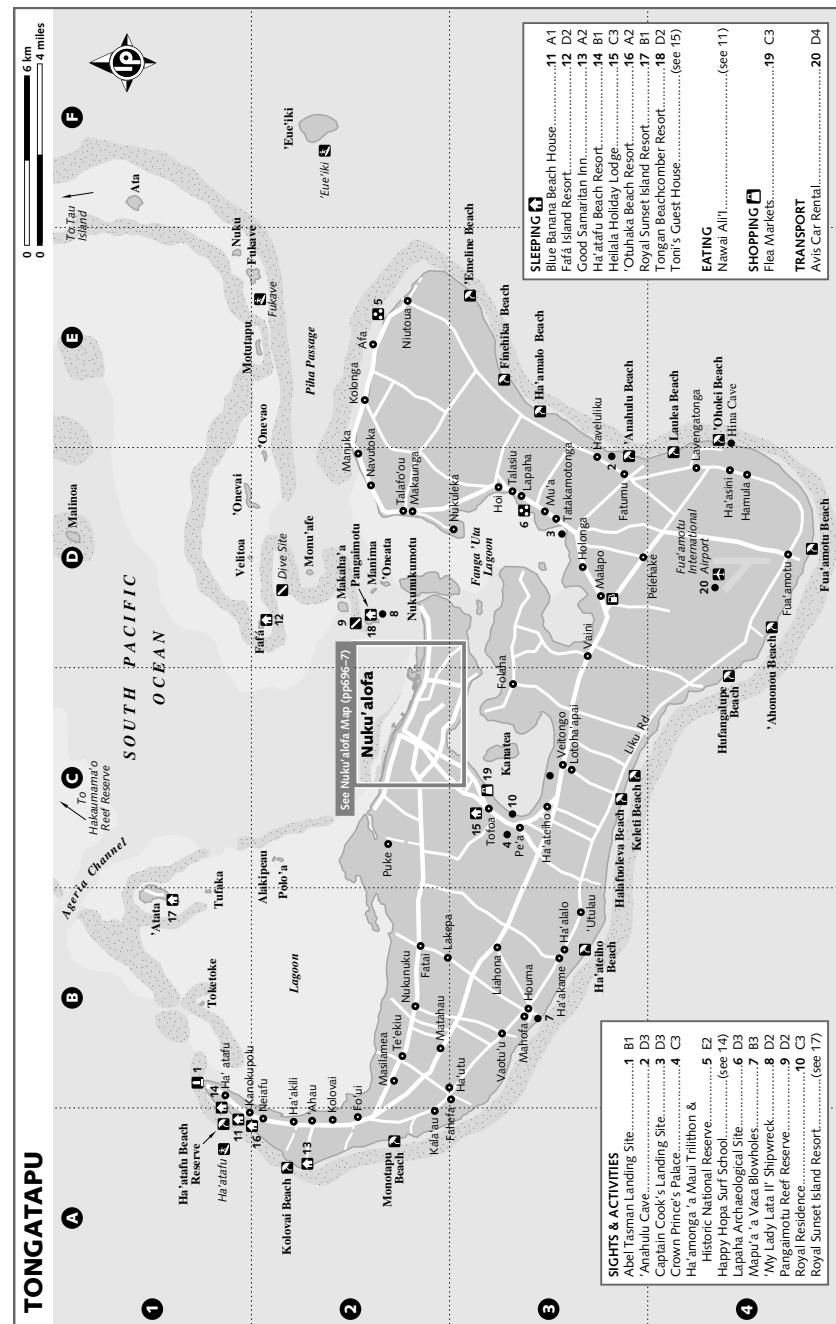
TONGATAPU IN...

Two Days

Spend day one finding your bearings on a circumnavigational island tour (p698), exploring archaeological marvels, caves and seaside cemeteries, witnessing the blowholes in action and getting acquainted with Tongatapu's western beaches. Alight in Nuku'alofa to soak up the sunset tones over the waterfront and dine on the best seafood around at the **Pearl Inn** (p701). On day two, join the bustle and explore the wares at **Talamahu Market** (p695), before perusing the capital's sights and getting acquainted with traditional culture at the **Tongan National Centre** (p695).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary then catch a ferry to 'Eua (p705) to hike in its dramatic landscape and soak up impressive ocean views, particularly during whale season. Or, head for Tongatapu's outer islands (p704) for beachside frolics and navel gazing. Join a **culture show** (p702) and do what the Tongans do so well – feast!



Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga. Ask specifically for any larger parcels. International post cleared 2pm Monday and Friday.

Tourist Information

Friends tourist centre (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26323; friends@tonfon.to; Taufa'ahau Rd) A switched-on tour-book office with plenty of details on what's happening around the island.

Tonga visitors bureau (TVB; Map pp696-7; ☎ 25334; www.tongaholiday.com; Vuna Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat & holidays) There are lists of church services and 'island nights' posted on a board outside.

Travel Agencies

The following agencies make bookings for local tours in addition to selling international flights:

Jetsave (☎ 23052; www.taufonua.com; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) Books day tours, and domestic package holidays to all island groups.

Jones Travel & Tours (☎ 23422/3; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds)

Teta Tours (☎ 23690; fax 23238; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

See p729 for information on transport between Tongatapu and other countries.

AIR

Fua'amotu International Airport is near Fua'amotu, a 30-minute drive from Nuku'alofa. **Airline Tonga Air Fiji** (www.airlinetonga.com) services 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niua from the domestic terminal. **Peau Vava'u** (☎ 28326; Pacific Royal Hotel, Taufa'ahau Rd) services Ha'apai and Vava'u. Domestic services fly out of the domestic terminal, nearby the International Airport. Transfers between the terminals cost T\$2.

Offices in Nuku'alofa of airlines connecting Tongatapu with other Pacific destinations include the following:

Air Fiji (☎ 23690; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds) Contact Teta Tours.

Air New Zealand (☎ 23192; www.airnz.co.nz; Tongi Arcade, Taufa'ahau Rd)

Air Pacific (☎ 23422/3; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds) Contact Jones Travel & Tours.

Pacific Blue (www.virginblue.com.au)

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 24566; www.polynesianairlines.com; cnr Salote & Fatafehi Rds)

BOAT

The MV 'Olovaha, and the MV *Pulupaki* connect Tongatapu with Ha'apai and Vava'u; the former also services the Niua. Other vessels provide frequent services between Tongatapu and 'Eua. See p731 for details of schedules and fares.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis meet all incoming flights, charging T\$20 to T\$25 between the airport and Nuku'alofa. Many hotels and guesthouses arrange transfers from the airport, or there's a Teta Tours bus (see p698) that does the trip for T\$12. **Toni's Tours** (☎ 21049; tonigh@kalianet.to) are the cheapest, charging T\$6/10 from/to the airport.

BICYCLE

Some guesthouses have bicycles for guest use.

Niko's Bicycle Rental (Map pp696-7; Waterfront, Vuna Rd; half-/full-day bicycle hire T\$5/8; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) is run from a trailer opposite the International Dateline Hotel. Test out a few.

BOAT

The offshore island resorts all provide boat transport. Boat trips near and far can be arranged with **Sea-Taxi** (☎ 22795, 15723; http://kalianet.to/seataxi).

BUS

Nuku'alofa's two bus terminals are on Vuna Rd. Buses to outlying areas of Tongatapu depart from the western terminal (close to Vuna Wharf; Map pp696-7), while Nuku'alofa buses leave from the eastern terminal (opposite the TVB; Map pp696-7). Fares range from 50 *seniti* to T\$1. The bus service starts around 6am, with the last departing about 4.30pm; there's no Sunday service.

In urban areas, bus stops are marked with a small sign reading 'Pasi'. Elsewhere, flag down a bus by waving. Passengers normally pay as they get off.

CAR & MINIBUS

Car- and minibus-hire companies offer unlimited kilometres included in their rates and some offer special rates for weekends or long-term rental. Contact Fab and Sunshine by telephone, as they will deliver rental cars to you. Companies include the following:

Avis (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21179, airport 35324; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) From T\$80 per day.

Fab Rentals (☎ 23077; fabsigns@kalianet.to; Salote Rd, Maufanga) Cars and vans for T\$50 to T\$60 per day, including insurance and door-to-door service.

Sunshine Rental Cars (☎ /fax 23848; srental@yahoo.co.nz; Lopaukamea, Nuku'alofa) Cars from T\$50 per day.

You must get a Tongan driving licence from the police before heading out.

TAXI

Within Nuku'alofa, taxis charge a standard T\$3 fare, or T\$5 to T\$6 to the outskirts of town. Taxis have a 'T' on the licence plate and are not permitted to operate on Sunday, but some guesthouses know secret Sunday taxi suppliers. Taxi companies include the following:

Aloha Fuaa Taxi (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22505) On the waterfront near the wharf.

Talamahu Market Taxi (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22713; cnr Salote & Railway Rds)

NUKU'ALOFA

pop 23,000

While it may not fulfil a vision of Pacific paradise, Tonga's 'big smoke', Nuku'alofa, still has a little charm and a little promise when you blow the dust from its surface. Its broad waterfront strip provides magnificent views across the bay to beautiful coral islands (just a boat ride away), there's a bustling market, enviable quality dining options for a place its size, and you'll still find the occasional chicken roaming in the main street. Nuku'alofa is the kingdom's seat of government and home of the royal family.

Royal Palace

Surrounded by large lawns and Norfolk pines, the white Victorian-style Royal Palace (Map pp696-7), with its red corrugated roof, is a symbol of Tonga to the rest of the world. The palace grounds are not open to visitors but you can get a good view from the waterfront area on the west side.

Royal Tombs

The Mala'ekula (Map pp696-7), the large parklike area opposite the basilica, has been the resting place of the royals since 1893. It's off limits to the public but you can peer through the crested perimeter fence.

Churches

Royal watchers/rubbernecks (regardless of denomination) head to the 1952 **Cenotaph Chapel** (Map pp696-7; Wellington Rd) to catch a glimpse of members of the royal family at a Sunday service and to hear the magnificent, booming singing of the congregation. Dress well.

Nuku'alofa's most distinctive structure is the circus tent-like **Basilica of St Anthony of Padua** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd), opposite the Royal Tombs. It has a beautiful interior of stained glass, wooden beams and hand-crafted furnishings.

St Mary's Cathedral (Map pp696-7; Vuna Rd), near Fuaa jetty, is worth visiting for its beautiful rose gardens, stained glass and vaulted ceiling.

Talamahu Market

One of Nuku'alofa's most interesting sights is **Talamahu** (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd; ☎ early morning-4.30pm), which is also the kingdom's main fresh-produce hub. Downstairs you'll find root-crop heavy produce in hand-made woven frond baskets, branches of bananas, colourful pyramids of weighed-out produce and a few food stands. Excellent Tongan arts and crafts are found on both floors.

Tongan National Centre

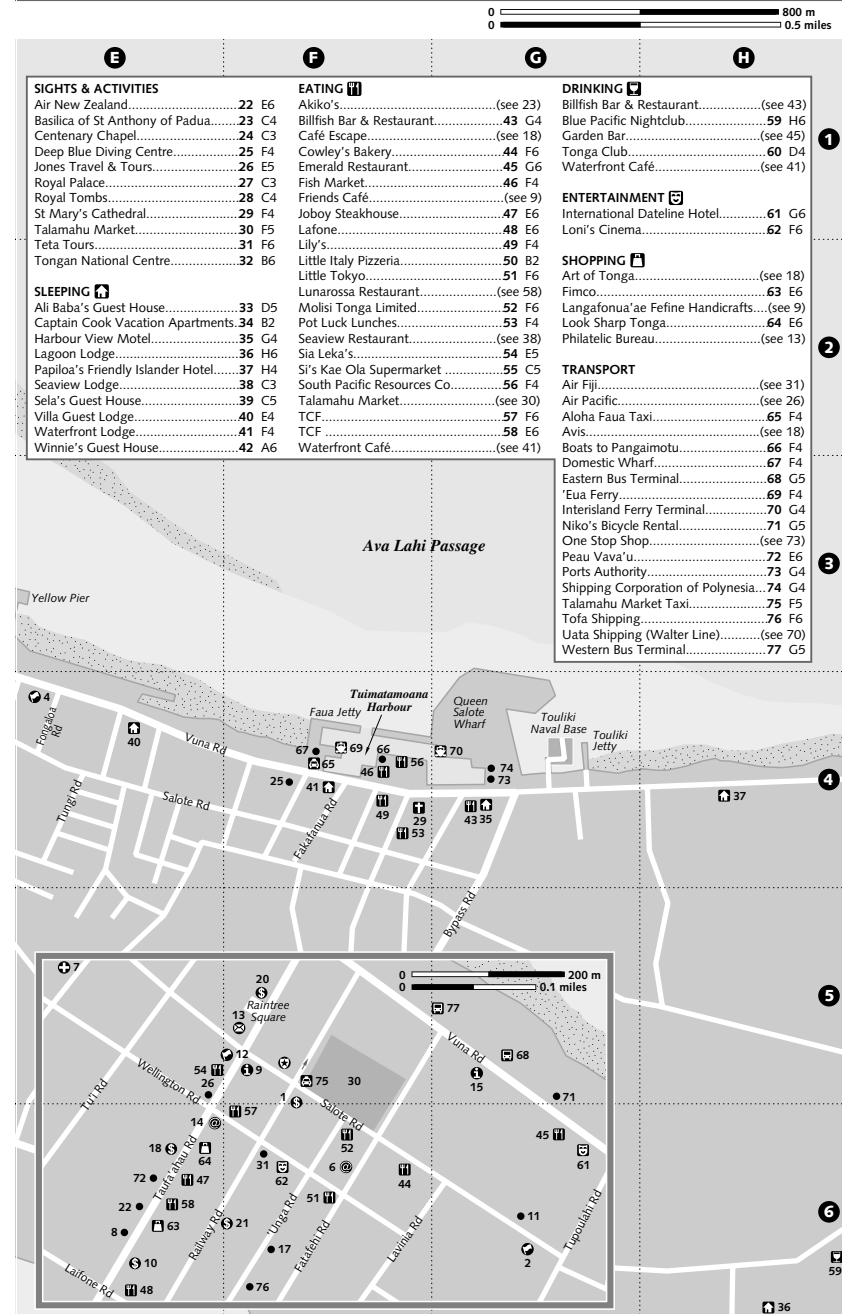
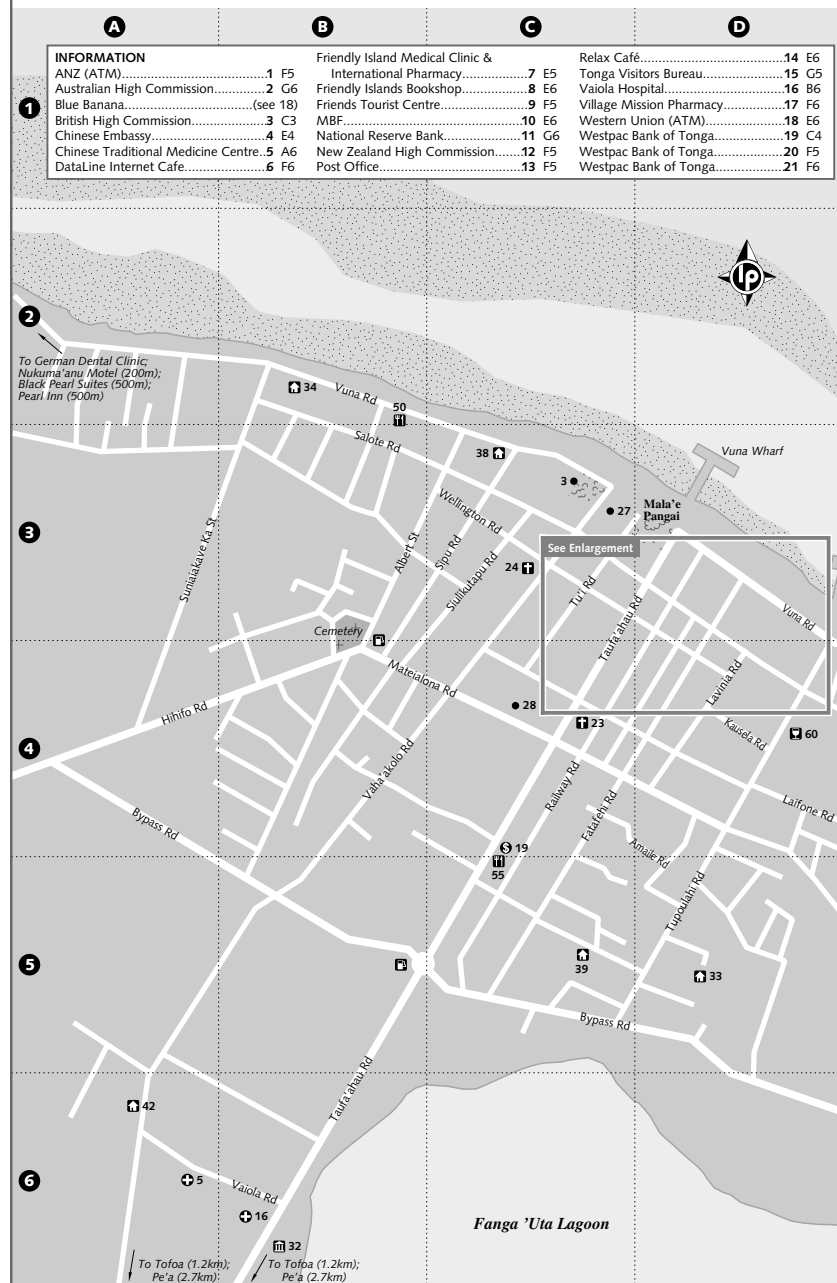
It would be a major feat to spend any time in Tonga without having some sort of cultural experience, but a visit to the **Tongan National Centre** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23022; Taufa'ahau Rd, Vaiola; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a good spot to start. The museum contains historical artefacts and cultural items still in use today.

Good-value **cultural tours** (adult/child T\$15/8; ☎ tours 2pm Mon-Fri) include demonstrations of tapa making, weaving and basketry, traditional dancing and carving.

The **dinner show** (adult/child T\$25/13, show only T\$5; ☎ 7.30pm Tue & Thu) starts with a kava ceremony, features traditional dishes cooked in an *umu*, and has one of Tonga's best traditional dance and music shows.

A ride in a local bus offers an experience of Nuku'alofa's contemporary culture, so take the Vaiola bus to the centre from the eastern terminal on Vuna Rd (50 *seniti*). Taxis cost about T\$4, and a shuttle bus (T\$1) is available for the dinner show.

NUKU'ALOFA



Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Around the Tongatapu Group subaquatic adventures range from snorkelling around the wreck off Pangaimotu and the excellent Makaha'a Reef to diving 'Eua's unique sea caves.

Deep Blue Diving Centre (Map pp696-7; ☎/fax 23379; www.deep-blue-diving.to; Vuna Rd) offers two dives (T\$85, including lunch and all gear) and five-/10-day dive packages (from US\$400/750). The major diving drawcards around Tongatapu are 'Eua's enormous sea caves and the beautiful uninhabited islands north of Tongatapu. Extended boat-based dive charters and accommodation packages are available.

Royal Sunset Island Resort (Map p693; ☎/fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to) on 'Atata is close to a host of dive sites. One-/two-tank dives cost T\$77/127. Full gear hire can mount to T\$69/110.

FISHING

Fish Aggregating Devices (similar to large buoys or floats that are put in the seriously deep water to attract smaller organisms and the big game that feed on them), located around the island, attract big game.

Precision Charters (☎ 24700; skipcust@kalianet.to) takes fisherfolk out to the big game for T\$600/1000 per half-/full day including lunch (maximum of four people).

Royal Sunset Island Resort (Map p693; ☎/fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to) offers half-/full-day game fishing for T\$550/850 (maximum four anglers).

Sea-Taxi (☎ 22797; sugar@kalianet.to) offers full-day game fishing for T\$1200.

SURFING

Tongatapu's northwest coast, off Ha'atafu Beach, is renowned for its surf. There's also a series of interesting-looking reef-breaks between Fukave and 'Onevao. The **Happy Hopa Surf School** (Map p693; ☎ 41088; www.surfingtonga.com, Ha'atafu Beach Resort, Ha'atafu) runs one-on-one surfing lessons (A\$25 per hour) for beginners and reef novices.

WHALE WATCHING

Many game fishing boats, as well as the Deep Blue Diving Centre, run whale-watching charters between June and November. You could also take a ferry across to 'Eua for this

purpose. See p707 for details on catching the ferry.

Tours

Tongatapu's main sights can be comfortably covered in a day tour of the island. Most tour operators require a minimum of four people.

Friendly Island Experience (☎ 29910; www.tongaexperience.com) Tongatapu island tours (T\$45, six to seven hours). Tours include fresh fruit. German and English are spoken. Arrange a meeting point when you call.

Jones Travel & Tours (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23422; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds) Half-/whole-island tours are T\$63/70.

Teta Tours (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23690; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds) Half-/whole-island tours are T\$55/70.

Toni's Tours (☎ 21049, 27068; tonigh@kalianet.to) Tongatapu's most popular full-day whole-island tours (T\$30) run daily (minimum three people). Take swimming gear, a torch (flashlight), drinks and lunch or organise to eat at Good Samaritan Inn. Other trips negotiable. Arrange a meeting point when you call.

Sleeping

Houses and flats for rent are listed at the TVB and on the bulletin boards at Friend's Tourist Centre and Molisi Tonga Limited supermarket (p702). Prices start around T\$400/500 per month for a furnished apartment/house; elegance will set you back upwards of T\$850 per month. Self-contained apartments in Nuku'alofa:

Captain Cook Vacation Apartments (Map pp696-7;

☎/fax 25600; info@captaincook.to; Vuna Rd; d apt T\$144, over 5 nights T\$133, extra person T\$29; ☎) Two-bedroom apartments on the waterfront. Two children under 12 stay free of charge.

Lagoon Lodge (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26515; vagoone.lodge@kalianet.to; 'Umusi; 1-bed apt from T\$170, 2-bed apt from T\$195) Bright, lagoonside apartments with ISD telephones. You'll need to take a taxi or hire a car.

Marketonga (☎ 75623; www.marketonga.to) Deals in furnished rental properties.

BUDGET

Guesthouses & Motels

Midrange options, including groovy Ali Baba's Guest House, Heilala Holiday Lodge and Papilola's Friendly Islander Hotel, also offer excellent budget rooms.

Toni's Guest House (Map p693; ☎/fax 21049, ☎ 27068; tonigh2@yahoo.co.uk; Tofua; r per person T\$10.75) Toni's is the ultrabudget favourite.

WHALING POLITICS *Miranda Tetlow*

Tongans have hunted whales for centuries, consuming whale meat and using whale bone in numerous traditional instruments and artefacts. Up until a royal decree in 1979, around 10 humpback whales were caught every year. Today, however, much of Tonga's tourist industry depends on the protected and migrating humpback whales. Although Tonga is not a member country of the IWC (International Whaling Commission), delegates have voiced their concern at Japan's attempts to reintroduce and increase commercial and scientific whaling. By a narrow margin at the IWC in June 2005, Japan and other countries' bid to have the existing moratorium lifted was defeated.

In 2003 Miranda Tetlow spent 12 months in Nuku'alofa, where she worked as a media advisor for a Tongan NGO. She has been passionate about Tonga and its people ever since.

It's renowned for regular all-inclusive kava sessions and the island's most popular tours (both are peppered with the owner's dry English humour) as much as for its vivid green walls. It's a basic place with a small, communal lounge and kitchen. The owners offer a shuttle service to/from town (which may incur a small fee); transfers to/from the airport cost T\$10/6.

Sela's Guest House (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25040; mettonga@kalianet.to; off Fatafehi Rd; dm T\$15, s/d T\$50/60) Stablelike rooms open off a central courtyard and guests have use of the kitchen. There are also rooms that share a bathroom (s/d/tr T\$20/30/40). Lavish cooked breakfasts with fruit are available (T\$8). It's a 15-minute walk from town.

Winnie's Guest House (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25215; winnies@kalianet.to; Vaha'akolo Rd; beds per person and breakfast T\$40; ☎) This homely five-room house about 2km from town has a well-equipped kitchen, and a lounge with board games and plenty of DVDs. Lunch is available for T\$10, dinner for T\$15. It's popular with international medical students, so book in advance.

Camping

Camping is possible at the Good Samaritan Inn (p704) on Ha'atafu Beach and on Pangaimotu (p704), offshore from Nuku'alofa.

MIDRANGE

Heilala Holiday Lodge (Map p693; ☎ 29910; www.heilala-holiday-lodge.com; Tofua; s/d T\$40/60, s/d Tongan fale T\$60/80, extra bed T\$25; ☎) Cute, thatched fale (houses) are spaced through tropical gardens with a shaded swimming pool in this unlikely suburban location, 3km south of Nuku'alofa. Rates include a toast and tropical trims breakfast, and kitchen facilities are

available; air-conditioning costs an extra T\$25. One-night stays cost 50% extra. Meals are served for mains T\$16.50 to T\$28. The owners can organise beach trips, island tours and car hire. Catch buses to Nuku'alofa (50 *seniti*, every few minutes) from Taufa'ahau Rd, a five-minute walk away.

Nukuma'anu Motel (☎ 22186; fax 24217; fml@tonfon.to; Vuna Rd, Sopa; d T\$104; ☎) Readers' have found these detached, airy Tongan fale, opposite the waterfront, the perfect retreat. Each is self-contained and has plenty of comforts. Some of the capital's best restaurants are nearby and it's a short drive or good stroll from the post office.

Harbour View Motel (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25488; vmtl@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; s/d T\$58/81, deluxe s/d/f T\$87/110/156, spa ste d/f T\$196/207; ☎) Handy to Queen Salote Wharf, the Billfish and surrounding bars, this motel has comfortable beds and some of the best-pressure showers in Tonga. Tidy rooms have fans, telephones and tea/coffee facilities, while deluxe rooms also offer air-conditioning, a fridge and TV/video. The continental breakfast spread (T\$8) is ample.

Papilola's Friendly Islander Hotel (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23810; papilola@tongatapu.to; Vuna Rd; dm T\$20, d unit/fale with bathroom T\$60/95, d self-contained bungalow T\$110; ☎) Like an uncle that found his look a couple of decades back – and stuck with it – this place is showing its age. The multipastel-coloured fale, with chintzy bed covers, are pleasantly spread throughout tropical gardens and the lounge/bar is verging on retro. Budget accommodation is in the drab units and comes without private bathrooms. A good spot for families, there's kids' play equipment (over concrete) next to the swimming pool. Continental cooked breakfast is T\$7.50/12.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ali Baba's Guest House (Map pp696-7; ☎ /fax 25154; www.alibabaguesthouse.com; off Tupoulahi Rd, Ngele'ia; s/d incl breakfast T\$40/60, d & f incl breakfast from T\$80, extra person T\$10; ☎) Funky floors in chequered gold with blue or green flow through each room, which have their own colour schemes and themes. The facilities are ultraclean and a festive, and the friendly ambience breezes though the communal lounge to the pretty gardens. Meals here are plentiful (dinner T\$15) and get rave reviews from guests. It's about 15 minutes' walk from the post office.

TOP END

Establishments in this category have cable/satellite TV, private telephones and some of Nuku'alofa's best restaurants attached to them. While all of these options are on the waterfront, there is no real beach here.

Villa Guest Lodge (Map pp696-7; ☎ /fax 24998; www.tongavilla.com; Vuna Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast T\$125/145/180; ☎) An elegant and breezy, unfussed colonial style flows through this attractive lodge that is centrally located and close to good restaurants. The five double rooms have compact bathrooms. There's a huge lounge and a broad balcony facing the waterfront – just perfect for dipping into a novel or two.

Seaview Lodge (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23709; seaview@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; standard/garden/seaview d T\$145/175/185; ☎) This reliable favourite for regulars has large balconied rooms (with great showers) decorated with local crafts. The lodge sits in immaculate gardens behind rave-worthy Seaview Restaurant, a few minutes' walk west of the post office.

Waterfront Lodge (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25260; waterfro@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; garden/seaview d incl breakfast T\$175/185, extra bed T\$41; ☎) The Waterfront's boutique-style elegance colours its eight spacious rooms, which are furnished in teak and cane, with Gauguin prints and marine-blue bed covers. French doors open onto the broad balcony, complete with deck chairs; and there are harbour views from 'seaview' rooms. (Children under 12 are not catered for.) Also the Waterfront Café (opposite) is located here.

Black Pearl Suites (☎ 28393; thepearl@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd, Sopa; d ste T\$180, executive ste T\$345; ☎)

Friendly staff have their finger on the 'guest comfort' pulse at this luxurious, waterfront spot on the outskirts of town. The ski chalet-like interior and four-poster or sleigh beds with Versace-style covers in burgundy and emerald are a South Pacific anomaly. Each room has a balcony, while executive suites have azure-tiled spa baths and fully equipped kitchens. Baby-sitting can be arranged. Its restaurant (Pearl Inn; see opposite) serves the best food in Nuku'alofa.

Eating

Nuku'alofa's decent spread of cafés and restaurants are mostly stretched along the waterfront Vuna Rd and on, or nearby, Taufa'ahau Rd.

Tongan cuisine can be sampled at island-style buffets and feasts (see p702).

CAFÉS

Friends Café (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22390; Taufa'ahau Rd; breakfast T\$4.50-13, mains T\$9.50-20; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, breakfast & lunch Sat) With a breezy charm and dependably good food, Friends, at the centre of town, is deservedly popular. The daily menu may feature seafood chowder, lamb shanks in herbed tomato over sweet potato mash, the ever popular stacked burgers or chunks of battered local fish. Sample the local roast, Royal Coffee.

Café Escape (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21212; Taufa'ahau Rd; breakfast T\$3.50-16, mains T\$8-16; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Slick little Café Escape could be anywhere but provides a refined, air-con oasis and infuses the tropics into its mixed menu. Choose from all-day breakfasts, *panini* and pies, Asian-style main dishes and sweet-tooth tempters. Great coffee.

Akiko's (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25339; Taufa'ahau Rd; snacks & meals T\$1.80-6.60; ☎) lunch Mon-Fri) Duck under the basilica for excellent-value Chinese and curry dishes, mixed Tongan plates and *'ota ika* (a Tongan raw-fish dish). Excellent smoothies.

QUICK EATS

Noodle and fried-rice dishes at Nuku'alofa's Chinese restaurants (many opening Sunday!) make good money-conscious meals (around T\$5).

Lily's (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24226; Vuna Rd; mains T\$6.50-15.50; ☎) 10am-2pm Mon-Sat, 6-10pm daily) Opposite the wharf, Lily's has clean food on its 101-item menu.

Emerald Restaurant (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24619; Vuna Rd; mains T\$5-18; ☎) lunch & dinner) Locals (including the adventurous airline pilots) assure us the generous dishes here are reliably good.

Eating *bain-marie* chicken dishes in a tropical climate could verge on an extreme sport, but if you're game you can pick up a local chicken or *sipi* (mutton flap) curry at **Sia Leka's** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd; dishes T\$4-6; ☎) lunch & dinner) or **Lafone** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24744; Laifone Rd; curry T\$3.50; ☎) 24hr Mon-Sat), opposite the basilica.

RESTAURANTS

Pot Luck Lunches (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25091; off Salote Rd; lunch T\$4-6; ☎) lunch Mon-Fri & dinner 2nd Mon of month during school terms) Take 'pot luck' on the one set meal prepared in this training restaurant behind St Mary's Cathedral. Bring your own alcohol.

Billfish Bar & Restaurant (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24084; Vuna Rd; lunch & dinner T\$10-32; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This is the closest you'll get to pub-style meals – and they're great. Choose from burgers, mountainous chicken stir-fry, Thai fish curry, ultrafresh fish and chips, NZ steaks and garlic prawns. There's often live music; see p702.

Joboy Steakhouse (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27920; Taufa'ahau Rd; mains T\$10-30; ☎) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Popular with locals and visitors alike for solid meals and every international rugby game on the big screen. Feast on seafood, top your prime (NZ) beef with a choice of sauces or tuck into an all-homemade Joboy burger. Ika flows on tap.

Little Tokyo (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22474; Wellington Rd; mains T\$7-17; ☎) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Wash down your made-to-order sushi, sashimi or *don* (meat/fish on rice) dishes with sake at this consistently good Japanese *iza-kaya* (drinking restaurant).

Little Italy Pizzeria (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25053; Vuna Rd; pizza & pasta T\$14-20; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The alps meet the Pacific in this Tonganified trattoria where hit-and-miss pizzas can verge on the experimental with occasional oddities such as baked beans. Fish and steak dishes and homemade Italian desserts plump up the menu. The garden play equipment makes it a good family spot. Takeaway available.

Lunarossa Restaurant (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26324; Taufa'ahau Rd; mains T\$18-36; ☎) dinner Mon-Sat; ☎) Sophisticates enjoy intimate fine dining on

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pearl Inn (☎ 28393; Vuna Rd, Sopa; entrée salads T\$16-21, mains T\$25-40, desserts T\$10-12; ☎) dinner Mon-Sun; ☎) This is where the foodies head for a fine-dining splurge (suggested as 'five star by NZ standards' by an avid fan). Prime rib, scotch and eye fillet steaks – sourced from Australia and NZ, along with the wines – are smothered in blue cheese or avocado sauce, while the best seafood in Tonga includes huge lobster grilled with mornay, avocado or whiskey sauce. Sunday's Prime Rib Roast night is a regular favourite (bookings essential).

authentic Italian cuisine, with the added bonus of ultrafresh and well-prepared seafood. The food is complemented by excellent service and good wines.

Seaview Restaurant (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23709; Vuna Rd; starters T\$12-23, mains T\$31-43; ☎) dinner) Seaview has long been on the lips of seafood-loving locals and expats. Order your lobster natural, 'Seaview', Thermidor, Provençale, Polynesian or saffron, or try noncrustaceans such as red snapper and fillet steak. Bookings recommended.

Waterfront Café (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21004; Vuna Rd; breakfast T\$11-18, snacks T\$16, mains T\$20-40; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Soak up the stylishly breezy mood and follow sundowners with reasonable meals of pasta (with truffle sauce), fish parcels, scotch-fillet steak, lobster and seafood.

SELF-CATERING

Talamahu Market (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd; ☎) early morning-4.30pm) Fruit and vegetables are sold by the pyramid (around T\$2 to T\$3) or woven frond basket (for root crops and coconuts) with prices generally marked.

Cowley's Bakery (The Bread Bin; Map pp696-7; ☎ 26019; Salote Rd; baked goods 30 senti-T\$2; ☎) 6am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) The Sunday afternoon social mecca does a brisk trade in baked goods including meat pies, pull-apart savoury breads, muffins, doughnuts and lurid pineapple-iced cupcakes.

Nuku'alofa has a number of supermarkets, including the competitively-priced branches of the **Tonga Cooperative Federation** (TCF; Map pp696-7; cnr Wellington & Taufa'ahau Rds; Taufa'ahau Rd) and the well-stocked **Molisi**

Tonga Limited (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd), opposite Talamahu Market, which sells wine. **Sif's Kae Ola Supermarket** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd) is by far the best stocked.

The fish market on Tuimatamoana Harbour starts when boats come in around 5am Monday to Saturday. **South Pacific Resources Co** (☎ 26296; Tuimatamoana Harbour; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), nearby, sells local fish and big game.

Drinking

Tongans drink with enthusiasm and Nuku'alofa has a spirited bar scene, ranging from upmarket to unashamedly seedy. Friday is the big night, as everywhere closes at midnight on Saturday.

Inquire locally about recommended kava circles (which you may be invited to join). Ordinarily a male-only affair, both men and women are welcome around the kava bowl at Toni's Guest House (p698).

A few popular venues line the waterfront on Vuna Rd.

Billfish Bar & Restaurant (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24084; Vuna Rd; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Thu, 9am-4am Fri, 5pm-11.59pm Sat) Easily the most popular bar in town, this relaxed open-air place (with decent food) regularly has live music.

Waterfront Café (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21004; Vuna Rd) Sip on sundowner champagne cocktails, margaritas and daiquiris, or a cool beer and sink into the rattan, Raffles-esque chairs at this Colonial-style bar/restaurant.

Blue Pacific Nightclub (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25994; admission Fri/Sat T\$6/3; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue-Fri, to midnight Sat) When the bars call for last drinks, night owls and those that 'just want to dance' (hip-hop, rap and reggae) head 3km southeast of central Nuku'alofa to Tonga's only real nightclub. It's quite likely someone else will commandeer your drink and that women – even those accompanied by husbands or male friends – will feel put upon to dance with local men.

For a cheap beer, head to **Tonga Club** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22710; Tupoulahi Rd), a dingy, historic pub, and the free-spirited **Garden Bar** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22101; Vuna Rd), behind the Emerald Restaurant.

Entertainment

ISLAND BUFFETS & TRADITIONAL DANCE

The best dance and buffet evenings (T\$25, half price for children) are held at the Tongan National Centre (p695) and beachside

Good Samaritan Inn (p704; T\$30 with Nuku'alofa transfer; 7.30pm Friday), on the western side of Tongatapu, which also has a Sunday barbecue with live music. At **International Dateline Hotel** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23411; Vuna Rd; ☎ 7.30pm Wed), you could show up around 8.30pm to watch the show for the price of a drink at the bar.

CINEMAS

Loni's Cinema (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23617; Wellington Rd; admission T\$5; ☎ Thu-Sat, midnight screening Sun) Nuku'alofa's only cinema is a very basic affair screening recent Hollywood staples.

Shopping

ARTS & CRAFTS

Tongan arts, crafts and carvings are sold on both floors of the Talamahu Market (p695) and in various shops along Taufa'ahau Rd.

Art of Tonga (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27667; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) Master carvings in wood, bone and shell make up the centrepiece of this small shop which has a refined collection of quality, well-displayed Tongan arts and crafts (making it easier to picture how souvenirs will look back home!).

Other good places to try include the following:

Langafonua'ae Fefine Handicrafts (Map pp696-7;

☎ 21014; Taufa'ahau Rd)

Friendly Islands Marketing Co-operative (Fimco;

☎ 23155; Taufa'ahau Rd)

CLOTHING

Flea markets (Map p693; Taufa'ahau & Vuna Rds; ☎ Sat morning) Join the locals and rifle through the stalls to find some old weavings and mats, and a change to the traveller's wardrobe: second-hand clothes, presoftered Hawaiian shirts.

The best shops for resort-style T-shirts:

Blue Banana (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22662; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) With T-shirt logos such as 'Kava-Cola' and handmade sarongs.

Look Sharp Tonga (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26056; Taufa'ahau Rd) Features plenty of hibiscus, tapa designs and a signature kava-dyed range.

STAMPS

Philatelic Bureau (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21700; post office, cnr Taufa'ahau & Salote Rds) Tonga's colourful stamps are interesting just to look at (marking various moments in history) and make good souvenirs.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Tongatapu features beaches, caves, blowholes and coral reefs, as well as some of the most extensive excavated archaeological sites in the Pacific.

Eastern Tongatapu

East of Nuku'alofa, between Tofoa and Pe'a, you'll pass the **royal residence** (Map p693) of the Princess, adorned with white tigers and cannons pointed towards the Crown Prince's austere European-style hill-top palace, opposite.

A cairn above a mangrove inlet near Holonga village marks **Captain Cook's landing site** (Map p693).

MU'A (LAPAHA)

The Mu'a area contains the richest concentration of archaeological remnants in Tonga. In AD 1200 the 11th Tu'i Tonga, Tu'itatui, moved the royal capital from Heketa (near present-day Niutoua) to Lapaha (Map p693), now known as Mu'a. There are 28 royal stone tombs (*langi*) in the area (15 of which are monumental), built with enormous limestone slabs carried by canoes either from nearby Pangaimotu, Motutapu and other parts of Tongatapu, or possibly from as far away as Ha'apai or even Futuna.

Turn towards the sea on the dirt road just north of the Catholic church to reach a grassy area with two monumental mounds. This is Tonga's most imposing ancient burial site.

The structure closest to the main road is the **Paepae 'o Tele'a** (Platform of Tele'a), a monumental, pyramid-like stone memorial. Tele'a was a Tu'i Tonga who reigned during the 16th century, though his body is probably not inside.

The other structure, the **Langi Namoala**, has a fine example of a *fonualoto* (vault for a corpse) on top – thought to be the burial site of a female chief – but it is also empty.

To the northeast of the two principal mounds is the **'Esi'aikona**, an elevated platform used as a rest area by the chief and his family. Also nearby is the **Hehea Mound**, built during an enormous ancient land-reclamation project.

HA'AMONGA 'A MAUI TRILITHON

The South Pacific's Stonehenge, the Ha'amonga 'a Maui (Maui's Burden) **trilithon**

(Map p693) near Niutoua, is one of ancient Polynesia's most intriguing monuments. Archaeologists and oral history credit its construction to Tu'itatui, the 11th Tu'i Tonga. The structure consists of three large coralline stones, each weighing about 40 tonnes, arranged into a trilithic gate; it's preserved in the National Historic Reserve.

It is now widely accepted that the trilithon had a similar function to Britain's Stonehenge: to track the changing seasons. Vegetation in line with the arms of the double-V design between the trilithon and the sea was cleared in 1967 and on the winter solstice the sun was seen to rise and set in perfect alignment with the clearings. On the summer solstice, the sun rose and set along the two other arms.

For the ancient Tongans, the significance of the summer solstice may have been related to the yam harvest, which was marked by the biggest festival of the year.

A walking track winds northward past several *langi* (known as the *Langi Heketa*), where fading interpretative signs make some sense of the remaining mounds of stones, including **'Esi Makafakinanga**, supposedly Tu'itatui's backrest. Such chiefly backrests were common in Polynesia and apparently Tu'itatui used this one as a shield against attack from behind while he watched construction.

Good-quality handicrafts, made by local artisans, are sold at the trilithon site.

Take the infrequent Niutoua bus (T\$1) and get off about 1km before Niutoua; the driver can indicate the spot. Head out early and return to Nuku'alofa in the early afternoon.

'ANAHULU CAVE

Tonga's most famous cave (Map p693) is an overloved, slightly eerie, place full of stalactites and stalagmites blackened from the soot of flaming-frond torches and too much traffic. The cool, refreshing pool is a popular swimming spot. Bring a torch.

Opposite the cave's entrance, a path leads to a beautiful sandy cove.

Buses run to tidy Haveluliku (or Fatumu just to the south) once or twice a day (T\$1), or walk 3km from Mu'a. Take the ocean-side dirt road between the main part of Haveluliku village and the cream-and-blue church.

Western Tongatapu

Tongatapu's west side is considered the island's 'scenic side'. A series of coves divided by rocky outcrops slope gently into clear pools on the southern coast, providing excellent swimming at high tide and an opportunity for observing the variety of marine life trapped at low tide. **Keleti Beach** (Map p693) and **Halafuoleva Beach** (Map p693) make good spots. The outer reef consists of a line of terraces and blowholes that shoot like geysers when the waves hit them at high tide. Do not swim too close to the blowholes – there's a powerful vortex that can suck you under. Taxis from Nuku'alofa cost around T\$12 each way.

MAPU'A 'A VACA BLOWHOLES

On an especially good day at Mapu'a 'a Vaca (Chief's Whistles; Map p693), hundreds of blowholes spurt at once. They are best viewed on a windy day with a strong swell, when the water, forced up through natural vents in the coralline limestone, can shoot 30m into the air. The blowholes stretch 5km along the south coast, near the village of Houma.

To get there by public transport, take a bus from Nuku'alofa to Houma and walk 1km south to the parking area above the blowholes. The *fale kaloa* at the turn-off on the main road sells delicious cone ice cream.

HA'ATAFU BEACH RESERVE

On the sunset side of the island, the Ha'atafu Beach Reserve (Map p693) encompasses Ha'atafu's clean, sandy beach and surrounding reef. There's protected swimming and reasonable snorkelling at high tide in the broad lagoon, and the reef-breaks offer some of the best surfing in Tonga (suitable for more experienced surfers).

The Happy Hopa Surf School (see Ha'atafu Beach Resort, following) runs one-on-one surfing lessons (A\$25 per hour) for beginners and reef novices.

The Hihifo bus passes all western Tongatapu's resorts; one-way fares from Nuku'alofa cost T\$1. A taxi costs T\$20 to T\$25.

SLEEPING & EATING

Blue Banana Beach House (Map p693; ☎ 41575; bluebanana@kalianet.to; d or tw per night/week T\$90/580, minimum 3 nights) Looking for a secluded,

self-contained studio cabin nestled among trees on the beach edge all to yourself? This beautifully decorated place has an outdoor shower, though the toilet is a walk away at the main house. Bring supplies or dine at nearby Nawai Ali'i.

Ha'atafu Beach Resort (Map p693; ☎ 41088; www.surfingtonga.com; dm half board A\$58, garden/beachfront fale per person half board A\$64/75, child 2-12yr A\$40) Mainly catering to all-inclusive surfing holidays, this lovely family-run setup is as laid-back and peaceful as you'd expect. Paths connect thatched-roof bungalows to clean, shared facilities and the dining room (sandwiches A\$2.50 to A\$6; great reports on the meals, by the way!). Facilities including snorkelling gear and paddle skis are for guest-use only.

Otuhaaka Beach Resort (☎ 41599; fax 24782; d fale T\$50, d bungalow T\$85, ste T\$250-270) 'Resort' is a loose term, but the open-sided Tongan *fale* restaurant (breakfast and lunch T\$3.50 to T\$12, mains T\$15) embraces an enviable slice of the beachfront. Choose a room with an updated bathroom.

Good Samaritan Inn (Map p693; ☎ 41022; fax 24102; fale with shared bathroom T\$23, s/d/f fale with private bathroom & breakfast from T\$69/92/115, extra person T\$23, camping per person T\$10) Behind the ocean-view restaurant (sandwiches T\$6.50 to T\$7.50, meals T\$12 to T\$14.50; open 7am to 10pm), these *fale* have an island-style mishmash of furniture and bright prints, a fan and small fridge. The family *fale* has million-*pa'anga* surf views from its balcony. On Friday night, dine on a traditional Tongan meal accompanied by a string band and rousing Tongan culture show (T\$25). Sunday's *umu* (T\$15) is popular with locals and visitors alike. It's a good 2km walk (or hitch) from the bus stop. The resort runs airport/city transfers T\$40/10 for house and buffet guests.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS & REEFS

Pangaimotu

Pangaimotu is the closest island resort to Nuku'alofa and offers the best-value day trips.

With a slight castaway or pirates-lair feel, excellent **Tongan Beachcomber Resort** (Map p693; ☎ 15762, 17257; www.pangaimotu.to; tent site/hire T\$12/6, dm T\$29, s/d 1st night T\$69/104, subsequent nights T\$58/92) overlooks the water and Nuku'alofa. It serves tasty meals (snacks T\$6 to T\$8.50,

mains T\$11 to T\$20) and has five rustic, thatched *fale*. There's good snorkelling in the marine reserve and around the half-submerged wreck of *My Lady Lata II* near the landing site (note: serious spinal injuries have befallen people leaping from its bow). Snorkelling gear and fins (T\$5 each) are available. No food or drink is supposed to be brought to the island.

Sunday trips to Pangaimotu leave from Fuaa Jetty, Nuku'alofa, at 10am, 11am, noon and 1pm, returning at 3pm, 4pm, 5pm and 6pm. From Monday to Saturday the boat leaves at 10am and 11am, returning at 4pm and 5pm. The trip (adult/child return T\$15/7.50) takes about 15 minutes.

Fafá Island

The most elegant of Tongatapu's island resorts (and one of the kingdom's best) is **Fafá Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎ 22800; www.fafa.to; d & tw superior fale US\$165, deluxe fale US\$220, extra person US\$44-55, half/full board US\$51/60), set on a magnificent beach. Spaced through palm groves, the traditional-style *fale* are perfect in their simplicity, with tall wood-shingle roofs and walls of woven palm leaves, wooden floors, white mosquito-net canopies strung over beds and private garden bathrooms with solar hot water.

The restaurant, perched behind the beach on the sunny side of the island, serves beautiful Euro-Asian-Tongan dishes featuring plenty of local seafood; it also hosts a weekly culture show and feast. Guests are free to use the water toys or join snorkelling trips, deserted island picnics and dive boats for a fee.

Day trips to Fafá (T\$57.50 including lunch) depart Fuaa Jetty at 11am and return at 4.30pm daily. One-way airport/Nuku'alofa to island transfers cost US\$21/10. Guests have complimentary twice-daily trips to Nuku'alofa.

'Atata

'Atata, 10km from Tongatapu, has lovely beaches, a small fishing village at its northern end and **Royal Sunset Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎ /fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to; PO Box 668, Nuku'alofa; bungalow s/d east side T\$115/160, west side T\$167/210, superior d T\$250, half/full board T\$75/86; ☎). Beachfront west-side bungalows soak up sunsets, while run-down east-side bungalows catch a few breezes. Each bungalow

has a private bathroom, ceiling fan, fridge and tea- and coffee-making facilities. The resort's Polynesian-style restaurant/bar is an incredible structure supported by immense wooden beams. Snorkelling, diving (see p698), kite-surfing and fishing are possible. Standards have slipped a little at this once bright star and recent guests have been disappointed by tired facilities.

Sunday day trips including lunch and boat transfers (45 minutes) cost T\$57.50. The boat leaves Tuimatamoana Harbour at 10am and returns at 4pm. Return airport/Nuku'alofa to island transfers cost T\$44/70.

'Eua

Rugged 'Eua (Map p688) is a slice of natural paradise all its own, with a growing awareness of itself as an ecotourism destination. It's no wonder travellers are inking it into their itinerary as an adventurous alternative to a simple sand-and-sea holiday.

INFORMATION

All basic services are in the small main town of 'Ohonua.

Friendly Islands Bookshop (☎ 50167) Film, magazines and a few paperbacks.

MAF (☎ 50122) This is a good source of information about the 'Eua Plantation Forest, 'Eua National Park and other bush areas.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The ocean crashes over rocks on 'Eua's shore, providing few safe swimming beaches, though wading in rock pools at the right tide is an option.

Contact Deep Blue Diving Centre (p698) to experience Tonga's largest sea caves, just off 'Eua, in visibility of over 60m all year round. One is likened to a cathedral.

Northern 'Eua

'Eua's northern tip is relatively inaccessible, but has some impressive features, including **Kahana Spring** and the nearby dramatic cliff-top **viewpoints**, from where you can scramble down to isolated **Fangutave Beach**. From there it's possible to hike through the rainforest to some spectacular hidden **caves**. The tracks can be difficult to find, so be sure to seek local advice, or better still, go with a local guide (see Tours, p706).

Central 'Eua

The eastern part of central 'Eua is covered with Tonga's greatest extent of natural rainforest, with dense junglelike growth, giant tree ferns and vines and a couple of enormous, ancient banyan trees. The 'Eua National Park and 'Eua Plantation Forest cover much of the area, which is underlaid with eroded limestone, causing a Swiss-cheese landscape of caves and sinkholes. Pick up a map of trails from the Hideaway (right).

Central 'Eua's highlights are the **Hafu Pool**; the dramatic **Lauua & Lokupo** lookouts overlooking the park, beach and pounding ocean; and the **'Ana Kuma** (Rat's Cave), where those who brave the unnerving drop into it are rewarded by spectacular views.

Southern 'Eua

Southern 'Eua's **Lakufa'anga** area contains the island's finest geological features, though you'll probably want to organise transport or a bike to reach them. The area's most prominent site is the **Rock Garden**, a collection of bizarrely shaped eroded coral slabs surrounded by a grassy meadow with wild horses. Close by is the **Liangahu'o 'a Maui**, a giant limestone arch. Across the arch is the **Bowl of Cliffs**, an impressive half-circle of cliffs between which the sea churns like a flushing toilet bowl.

TOURS

The Hideaway (right) assists guests plan unguided **hikes** and runs guided walks to 'Eua's prime sites (T\$45 with lunch), one including the caves of the remote north (T\$60).

Island tours can be organised with the Hideaway (T\$45 including lunch), Susan's Guest House (right; T\$40) and Taina's Place (right; adult/child T\$45/free).

The Hideaway also organises half-day whale-watching boat trips (with one/two/three people for T\$150/125/100 per person).

SLEEPING

All accommodation on 'Eua is of the budget variety. Hosts generally offer wharf transfers for T\$4.

If your plan is to stay just the one night, you could sleep on a bench or floor space on the ferry and spare yourself the pre-4am wake-up call to head down to the ferry.

Hideaway (☎ 50255; www.kalianet.to/hideawayeua; Tufuvai village; camping T\$12, s/d incl breakfast T\$40/50) This is the first choice for most travellers to 'Eua. Its viewing platform, built over the rocky shore, makes for fantastic sunset viewing and whale watching (June to December). Comfortable motel-style rooms have good, hot showers. Breakfast is T\$6 to T\$8.

Taina's Place (☎ 50186; Telefoni Rd; camping per tent T\$10, tent hire T\$15, cabin s/d/tr T\$20/30/40) Five cute houses are arranged in gardens near the forest. Bathroom facilities are nearby and the communal lounge/kitchen area is an easy spot to relax in. Kitchen use per day is T\$5; breakfast is T\$6. The newly built family house has its own kitchen.

Other options:

Susan's Guest House (☎ 50088; s/d T\$20/30, extra person T\$10) Rooms are basic in this friendly family home. Breakfast is T\$7 to T\$8, dinner T\$12. A Sunday *umu* (T\$12) can be arranged.

Highlight Guest House (☎ 50143; Mata'ahu village; s/d T\$25/40; kitchen use T\$5) Rooms in a spacious house. Breakfast/lunch/dinner T\$6/8/12.

Deep Resort (☎ 50421; moanas@kalianet.to; Tufuvai village; dm T\$25, s/d incl breakfast T\$40/80) Three newish and roomy log-look cabins in an unbeatable position on Tufuvai Beach.

EATING

The Ta'anga Supermarket and Tonga Co-operative Federation in 'Ohonua have limited stocks, but it's advisable to bring some supplies from Nuku'alofa.

Cooked meals are available at all accommodation places, for guests and nonguests (book by noon). The most popular is the Hideaway's ocean-view bar-restaurant (dinner T\$18 to T\$20), while the Deep Resort's Tongan-style bar-restaurant (meals T\$7.50 to T\$20) is a charming spot to sit and soak up afternoon beverages and crashing surf. Taina's expansive dinner spreads (T\$15 to T\$18) include Tongan specialities (fish, coconut cream curry and 'ota ika).

ENTERTAINMENT

The Hideaway and the Deep Resort have bars that are open to guests and nonguests. The Maxi Disco Hall is alcohol-free, but visitors – especially women – are advised to avoid it, as the risk of harassment is very high.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

On a calm day there is nothing to the 1½- to 2½-hour ferry trip between 'Eua and Tongatapu (T\$17 one way), but it can get very rough.

There is no bus service but you can organise transport with accommodation hosts. Bike and horse hire can be arranged at Taina's Place (T\$12) and the Hideaway (bike/horse T\$15/30).

Airlines Tonga Air Fiji (www.airlinestonga.com) makes the 10-minute flight from Tongatapu to 'Eua's Kaufana Airport (one way T\$45) twice daily. Bookings are through Teta Tours (p698).

Minerva Reef

This reef (Map p688), awash most of the time, is Tonga's southernmost extremity. It lies 350km southwest of Tongatapu and serves as a rest point for yachts travelling from Tonga to NZ.

HA'APAI GROUP

pop 8400 / area 110 sq km

Sprinkled across the kingdom's central waters, Ha'apai's islands appear like the idyllic South Pacific paradise: low coral islands, vibrant reefs, deserted white beaches and even the odd volcano. Those willing to forgo the trimmings reap the rewards – even bare-brass budgeters can walk across a reef for their slice of paradise in a thatched *fale* on a large patch of sand. And only a scattering of tourists visit each year. It's a sleepy, seductive place, well off the beaten track – and you get the feeling the people would prefer to keep it that way.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Ha'apai's Salote Pilolevu Airport is 3km north of Pangai on Lifuka. **Peau Vava'u** (office ☎ 60717; cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds) flies at least daily (except Sunday) between Ha'apai and Tongatapu, and three times a week between Ha'apai and Vava'u. See p730 for details.

Boat

The MV *'Olovaha* and the MV *Pulupaki* stop twice weekly at Pangai on Lifuka on

both their northbound and southbound runs between Tongatapu and Vava'u. See p731 for ferry details.

There are marginally protected anchorages along the lee shores of Lifuka, Foa, Ha'ano, Uoleva, Ha'afeva, Nomuka and Nomuka'iki.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport & Wharf

Most places to stay offer free airport pick-ups and will arrange drop-offs. Taxis charge T\$5 between the airport and Pangai on Lifuka, while the sporadic bus service between Pangai and the airport turn-off costs T\$1.

Bicycle

Lifuka and Foa are flat. Some guesthouses have bicycles for guest use (and may rent out any surplus), and Penny's (p710) hires out bikes. Expect to pay T\$8 to T\$15 per day.

Boat

The TVB and guesthouses will generally assist in arranging boat transport around the islands.

Bus

A sporadic bus service operates between Hihifo, south of Pangai on Lifuka, and Faleloa on Foa roughly between 8am and 4pm weekdays and 8am and noon Saturday. The trip from Pangai to Faleloa costs T\$1. There's a bus stop on the corner of Holopeka and Fau Rds.

Taxi

Several taxis operate in Pangai; try **John** (☎ 60124), **Siaosi** (☎ 60072) or **Ioane** (☎ 60509). The fare around town is T\$2.

Activities

Sandy, deserted beaches and uninhabited islands may be all you need for a perfect trip to Ha'apai, but activities such as cultural explorations, foot-powered reef crossings, cycling, horse riding, snorkelling, diving and whale watching can be easily added to the mix.

Happy Ha'apai Divers (☎ 60639; www.tonga-dive.com; PO Box 61, Pangai), based at Sandy Beach Resort on Foa, focuses on long, slow dives around the north Lifuka Group. One/two dives costs US\$65/90 and rental gear is

WILLIAM MARINER

Thanks to a series of serendipitous incidents, the world has an extensive account of the customs, language, religion and politics of pre-Christian Tonga.

In February 1805 15-year-old William Charles Mariner went to sea on the privateer *Port-au-Prince*. The voyage took the ship across the Atlantic, around Cape Horn, up the west coast of South America, to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands and finally into Tonga's Ha'apai Group. The crew anchored at the northern end of Lifuka and was immediately welcomed with yams and barbecued pork. Their reception seemed friendly enough, but the following day the crew members became suspicious that some sort of plot was afoot. The ship's captain chose to ignore their fears.

On 1 December 1806 an attack was launched while 300 Tongans were aboard the ship. The British, sorely outnumbered, decided to destroy the ship, its crew and its attackers rather than allow it to be taken. Young Mariner was captured and escorted ashore.

Mariner was persecuted by the Tongans until he was summoned by Finau 'Ulukalala I, the reigning chief of Ha'apai. The king assumed that Mariner was the captain's son and ordered the young man's life to be spared.

Meanwhile, the *Port-au-Prince*, which hadn't been destroyed, was dragged ashore, raided and burned. The conflagration heated the cannons sufficiently to cause them to fire, creating panic among the Tongans. Mariner pantomimed an explanation of the phenomenon, initiating a rapport with the Tongans that would carry him through the next four years.

Mariner was taken under the wing of Finau and became privy to most of the goings-on in Tongan politics. He learned the language well and travelled with the chief, observing and absorbing the finer points of Tongan ceremony and protocol. He was given the name *Toki 'Ukamea* (Iron Axe) and Finau appointed one of his royal wives, Mafi Hape, to be Mariner's adoptive mother.

After the death of Finau, the king's son permitted young William to leave Tonga on a passing English vessel. Back in England, Mariner married, fathered 12 children and became an unsuccessful stockbroker. Were it not for a chance meeting with an amateur anthropologist, Dr John Martin, his unique Tongan experiences might have been lost. Martin, fascinated with Mariner's tale, suggested collaboration on a book, and the result, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, is a masterpiece of Pacific literature.

William Mariner drowned in a canal in southern England in 1853.

LIFUKA GROUP

Most accommodation and services are located within the Lifuka Group. Lifuka Island, with its capital Pangai, is the centre of Ha'apai's limited activity.

Lifuka

Petite Pangai, Lifuka's main town, has a pleasantly soporific atmosphere and holds Lifuka's basic services. There's little to do except wander the empty beaches that nearly encircle the island, although there's some good snorkelling off the sheltered western beaches.

INFORMATION

The water supply in Ha'apai should be used only for washing and bathing. Only drink water collected in rainwater cisterns.

Friendly Islands Bookshop (☎ 60198; Holopeka Rd)

Stocks a few titles on Tonga, magazines, film and fishing supplies.

Niu'ui Hospital (☎ 60201; Hihifo) Basic facilities.

Appointments are necessary and the pharmacy is open 8.30am to 4.30pm.

Post office (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds) Mail can be sent c/o Post Office, Pangai, Ha'apai. The Customs & Inland Revenue office is also based here.

Tonga visitors bureau (TVB; ☎/fax 60733; www.tongaholiday.com; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A sometimes helpful office that posts tide timetables and may assist with accommodation bookings, horse-riding or boat charter queries.

Westpac Bank of Tonga (☎ 60933; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Exchanges foreign currencies (cash and travellers cheques), gives cash advances on Visa and MasterCard and also deals with MoneyGram cash transfers. Phonecards are sold here.

SIGHTS

Afa Historical Museum

This tiny museum (Holopeka Rd; ☎ opening times vary) displays pieces of 3000-year-old Lapita pottery, traditional headrests, old photographs, rocks from Tofua and items used in the production of handicrafts. A folder of newspaper clippings covers the history and geology of volcanic Tofua, but there is little other signage.

Shirley Baker Monument & European Cemetery

About 800m north of Pangai, the grave and monument of Reverend Shirley Baker, Tonga's first prime minister and adviser to King George Tupou I, stands amid the graves of various 19th- and early-20th-century German and English traders and missionaries. A Tongan cemetery, with decorated sand and coral mounds, is directly opposite.

Hihifo's Archaeological Sites

Hihifo, the village south of Pangai, hides some archaeological relics seemingly of more interest to rooting pigs than anyone else. Hidden behind a low wire fence in a grove of ironwood is **Olovehi Tomb** (Loto Kolo Rd), the burial ground for people holding the noble title of Tuita.

About 1.2km south of Pangai, a turning towards the east leads to the circular **Velata Mound Fortress**, a type of ring ditch fortification found throughout Tonga, Fiji and Samoa.

Southern Lifuka

From Hihifo, a dirt road continues to **Hulu'ipaonga Point**, with its sweep of white

beach (and a disappointing nonbiodegradable waste problem). About 200m short of the beach is **Hulu'ipaonga Tomb**, the burial site of the Mata'uave line of chiefs.

SLEEPING

All accommodation in Pangai is basic.

Fonongava'inga Guesthouse (☎ 60038; vimahi@kalianet.to; Palace Rd, Pangai; s/d/tr T\$15/25/45) The broad veranda and homely, light-filled communal lounge make this recommended place, also known as Langilangi Guesthouse, worth the few minutes' walk from the centre of town. Langilangi enjoys teaching local crafts to guests. Breakfast is T\$6, dinner T\$20 to T\$30, kitchen use per day T\$3.

Fifita Guesthouse (☎ 60213; Fau Rd, Pangai; s/d incl breakfast T\$25/35, f with sitting room T\$65) Fifita's central location behind Mariners Café and just a short walk from the wharf makes it a popular place. It's basic but friendly, with plenty of travel banter exchanged (sometimes loudly) in the communal kitchen. Lack of a lounge makes it a bit drab during rainy periods.

Billy's Place (☎ 60336; s/d fale incl breakfast T\$55/65, larger fale T\$65/75, self-contained fale T\$100, minimum 2-night stay) Ropes of buoys dangle from pandanus roots between Billy's open-sided dining terrace (lunch/dinner T\$12/20) and views of breaking surf (and whales in season) beyond the quiet beach. Boardwalk paths wind through gardens, connecting secluded bungalows with clean, shared facilities nearby (kitchen use T\$5 per day). Nonguests can enjoy the food here, and a Sunday *umu* can be arranged. Situated 1.5km northeast of Pangai, lone travellers could relish the peace or feel a bit isolated. It's a 10-minute bike ride (free mountain bikes are available for guests) or a T\$4 taxi ride. No children under 12.

Other options on Lifuka:

Mele Tonga Guesthouse (☎ 60042; Holopeka Rd, Holopeka; house d T\$20, traditional fale s/d T\$20/30) A secluded, beachfront traditional Tongan fale and standard rooms in the house, located five minutes' walk from the airport. Breakfast/lunch/dinner costs T\$8/10/12.

Lindsay Guesthouse (☎/fax 60107; cnr Loto Kolo & Tuita Rds, Pangai; s/d/f T\$20/30/50) A clean and friendly spot, with a broad veranda and communal sitting room and kitchen, and the warm and irresistible scent of baking bread wafting across the lawn from the bakery. Bikes (T\$8) are available for guests. Breakfast is T\$6 to T\$10, dinner T\$15 to T\$20.

available; see the website for package details. Two-day diving trips to Tofua and Kao were set to commence in 2006. For more on diving in the Vava'u Group, see p74. Sea kayaks cost US\$20 per day and small-group whale-watching trips cost US\$45/70 per half-/full day (including snorkelling gear).

Camping experiences on remote islands include fishing, possible whale sightings and the very cool experience of just being out there.

Mariners Guided Camping Tours (☎ 60374; www.tongacamping.com) tempts with combined kayaking/camping/hiking trips to Ha'apai's more remote islands: some are uninhabited; some offer a traditional cultural experience; and one has an active volcano. It also organises whale-watching trips between August and October.

Friendly Islands Kayak Company (p717) also offers organised kayaking in Ha'apai.

'Evaloni's Guesthouse (☎ 60029; Loto Kolo Rd, Pangai; s/d T\$15/25, d with private bathroom from T\$45) A ramshackle range of fan-cooled rooms (the upstairs rooms are nicer) and a tapa-lined veranda on which to shoot some pool. Order meals in advance (breakfast T\$15) or use the well-equipped kitchen (kitchen use T\$1.50).

EATING

There are few options to eat out in Pangai. Guesthouses accept nonguests for dinner with advance bookings, and Foa (below) offers further options.

Mariners Café (☎ 60374; VHF Channel 16; Fau Rd; meals & snacks T\$6.50-16.50; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun, occasionally closed 3-5pm to go fishing) You won't fully appreciate the lure of Mariners until you've spent some time on Ha'apai's shores. This relaxed social mecca is Lifuka's only real restaurant (and bar substitute) and fortunately has a good range of tasty and fresh dishes. It's a good place to come for local knowledge.

Penny's (Waterfront; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a lovely view over the harbour from the 1st floor of the green waterfront building, Penny's plans to serve meals and hire out bicycles (T\$15).

Matuku-ae-tau Bakery (Lindsay Guesthouse, cnr Loto Kolo & Tuita Rds; ☒ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 5-8pm Sun) The bakery's two ovens keep the island in bread, jam-filled rolls and *keki* (which are similar to doughnuts). There's a mad rush on Sunday afternoon.

Pangai'isi Supermarket (☒ 7am-11pm), opposite the wharf, has different stock from the **Tonga Cooperative Federation** (Holopeka Rd), though both are limited. The *fale koloa* (general stores) around town each stock basic necessities and their own extras, such as cakes, eggs or frozen chicken. Pickings are often slim at **Pangai Market** (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rd; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat); head down early in the day for fresh produce.

SHOPPING

Women's Island Development Handicraft Shop (☎ 60478; Loto Kolo Rd) Local women sell their tapa, cards and various woven items made from pandanus leaves here.

Foa

Houmale'eia Beach, on the tip of quiet Foa, is the best beach on the 'mainland', with sandy water access, sublime views of Nukunamo and some beautiful snorkelling. The

heavily wooded island is connected by a causeway to Lifuka.

SLEEPING

Matafonua Watersports Resort (Sandy Beach ☎ /fax 60600; www.sandybeachresort.de; fale d & tw T\$80) These uncluttered, elevated *fale* have water views over foreshore foliage and mosquito nets over beds. Purpose-built as a dive resort in 2006, it offers freshwater supply showers in well-designed shared facilities. Kids are welcome. A kiosk-style café-bar overlooks Nukunamo.

Sandy Beach Resort (☎ /fax 60600; www.sandybeachresort.de; d US\$140) Long regarded as one of Tonga's best resorts, Sandy Beach's comfortable (if plain) bungalows are oriented for sunset views over the magnificent white-sand Houmale'eia Beach. Rates include freshwater/solar-heated showers, complimentary bicycles, snorkelling gear, kayaks and airport and town (bank) transfers. No children under 12. Depending on guest numbers, nonguests may be able to book for upscale three-course dinners (call before noon; US\$29). Sandwiches, burgers, pizza and cocktails are served at the terrace bar (snacks T\$7 to T\$15). Breakfast is US\$9.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

A sporadic bus service from Pangai stops at Faleloa (T\$1 one way), a 25-minute walk from the resorts and Houmale'eia Beach. By bicycle from Pangai takes around 45 minutes; the taxi fare is about T\$15.

Nukunamo

The enticing picture-postcard island viewed from the tip of Foa is Nukunamo, an uninhabited island with a shining white beach covered with beautiful shells. Take flip-flops/sandals to walk around the island. At low tide, you can snorkel to Nukunamo over the life-filled coral heads between the islands. Only confident swimmers should attempt this, and only with local advice, as the currents through the pass can be powerful. You can also cross by kayak (see p707 to hire a kayak from Happy Ha'apai Divers).

Ha'ano

Cultural travellers will get a good dose of traditional Tongan life on the strikingly clean and friendly island of Ha'ano. To get

there, take one of the following options: charter a boat (T\$50 one way); wait for the water taxis from Faleloa jetty, on Foa, early morning and mid-afternoon (around T\$5 one way); or paddle a double kayak across from Foa (see p707 to hire a kayak from Happy Ha'apai Divers).

Uoleva

If you're looking for paradise on a budget, Uoleva is the place to come for it. It's ultrabasic with little to do other than swim, snorkel and fish – perfect!

SLEEPING

Uoleva's very basic accommodation has unbeatable, absolute beachfront positions on a broad, white-sand beach on the northwest coast. Bring your own drinks, some food and mosquito repellent and inform owners in advance if you want meals. There's no love lost between Uoleva's 'resort' owners.

Daiana Resort (☎ 60612; s/d/f fale T\$18/25/45; breakfast/dinner T\$5/12) Ponder the stars and lapping waves over the nightly beach bonfire at this absolute beach-bum paradise. Tapa-lined *fale* have mats over sandy floors and enclosed sitting areas. Bathroom facilities are rudimentary (water is pumped from the well for a shower), but this contributes to Daiana's charm.

Captain Cook Resort (☎ 77106, 60014; s/d cabins T\$18/25) Dappled sunlight streams through shade-giving trees onto the attractive, sandy grounds around these basic wood-panelled cabins. The blue, absolute beachfront cabin is the pick of the bunch. Lone travellers (particularly women) have found this, at times edgy, environment uncomfortably isolated. Breakfast/dinner is T\$6/12, kitchen use per day T\$4.50.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

You can walk/wade between the southern tip of Lifuka and the northern tip of Uoleva at low tide, but get local advice (and a tide chart from the TVB) before you attempt it. It takes 40 minutes to walk from Pangai to the southern tip of Lifuka (taxi T\$5), around 20 minutes between the islands, and a further hour or so to reach Uoleva's resorts.

Both resorts offer transfers for guests from Pangai (T\$15 one way). To charter a small boat for the day (around T\$50)

contact the TVB, the resorts themselves or Pangai guesthouses.

'Uiha

The conservative and traditional island of 'Uiha is a friendly place with two villages: 'Uiha, with a wharf, and Felemea, about 1.5km south.

In the centre of 'Uiha village is a large, elevated burial ground containing several ancient **royal tombs**. At the village church are two **cannons**, souvenirs taken from a Peruvian blackbirding (slaving) ship – attacked and destroyed by the locals in 1863.

'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay (☎ 60605, 60438; VHF Channel 16 or book through TVB; fale s/d T\$20/25) You'll get a good introduction to village life at this friendly, welcoming place right on the beach at Felemea. Snooze in a thatch-and-fibro *fale* by night and swing in a hammock by day. Shared facilities are clean and there's a small kitchen (T\$3), or with notice the owners will prepare delicious Tongan food (breakfast T\$6, dinner T\$12 to T\$15).

The TVB in Pangai can arrange boat transport for around T\$10 per person each way. 'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay provides transfers for T\$25/30 for one/two people, one way.

OTHER HA'APAI GROUP ISLANDS

Some inter-island ferries stop at or near **Hafeva**, around 40km southwest of Lifuka, a friendly (if crowded) island with beautiful views of Tofua and Kao and great sunsets.

Petite **Nomuka** and its companion island, **Numuka'iki**, receive few visitors, but can be explored on organised camping/kayaking trips (see p707) from Tonagatapu or Lifuka.

Tofua & Kao

Pyramidal Kao (1109m) and its smoking partner, Tofua (507m), are visible from Lifuka. Tofua is the most active of Tonga's volcanoes and entices the intrepid to venture to remote shores, hike up its Jurassic Park-cum-mooncape crater and peer into its glowing caldera. At the bottom of the crater is a beautiful, crystal-clear lake.

The crater rim is a tough 1¼-hour climb. From 50m due south of the old school at Hokala, follow the track through forest, tree ferns and ironwood; the vegetation gradually gets shorter as you climb. Look out for the beautiful orchids.

NEIAFU

pop 5900

Nestled between several low hills in the Port of Refuge, Neiafu is Tonga's most picturesque town, and home to restaurants, bars and a Friday yacht race (p717). On Sunday the town is mostly quiet, aside from the vibrant and uplifting singing emanating from numerous churches.

Information

Vava'u has its own radio station: FM1, at 89.3FM. A yachties' information net is on VHF Channel 6 at 8.30am Monday to Saturday.

BOOKSHOPS

Most places to stay have libraries and/or book exchanges for guests. Tropical Tease (p721) has a selection of titles for exchange. **Friendly Islands Bookshop** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70505; Fatafehi Rd) A few excellent titles on Tonga, as well as magazines and film.

INTERNET ACCESS

Café Tropicana (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71322; Fatafehi Rd; per 15min T\$3) This café also burns CDs.

Coconet Café (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71311; VHF Channel 16; per 5min T\$1; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Waterfront, below Tongan Bob's.

Maamamo'onia Hall (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70570; Tu'i Rd; 1hr T\$5; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Sat) In the school.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Italian Clinic & Pharmacy (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70607; i_clinic@kalianetvav.to; Main Wharf; clinic ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-10.30am Sat, pharmacy ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) Consultations with Dr Alfredo Carafa cost T\$25 to T\$35; a dive health certification is T\$25.

Prince Wellington Ngu Hospital (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70201; Mateialona Rd; ☎ 24hr) For emergencies.

MONEY

The Westpac Bank of Tonga, ANZ, Western Union and MBF, all on Fatafehi Rd (Map pp716-17), change cash and travellers cheques. All open until around 11.30am on Saturday, except for ANZ, which has a 24-hour ATM with Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus facilities.

POST

Post office (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70002; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) North of Utukalongalu market. Poste

restante mail (c/o General Delivery, Post Office, Neiafu, Vava'u).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tonga visitors bureau (TVB; Map pp716-17;

☎ 70115; fax 70666; VHF Channel 16; Fatafehi Rd;

☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A well-stocked office with helpful, well-informed staff happy to assist with bookings and accommodation reservations.

Sights

Taking in the Port of Refuge view of yachts bobbing on their moorings from a café or bar may be the only sight you need to see in Neiafu.

Standing high above the Port of Refuge, on Fatafehi Rd, colonial-style **St Joseph's Cathedral** (Map pp716-17) is the most prominent structure and acts as a beacon for arriving yachties. The stretch of road along the waterfront cliff below the cathedral is **Hala Lupe** (Way of Doves), named for the mournful singing of the female prisoners (convicted of adultery by the church) who constructed it.

A staircase leads down to the **IFAW Marine Awareness Centre** (Map pp716-17; www.ifaw.org), an excellent place to learn more about humpback whales and their conservation.

OLD HARBOUR

Near the entrance to the sunken Hala Tafengatoto (Road where Blood Flows) pathway in eastern Neiafu are several **freshwater springs** bubbling into the Old Harbour. The most reliable is **Matalave**, which lies around the harbour to the east. Nearby is the rocky outcrop said to have been the primary Vava'u landing site of the *kalia*, the double-hulled canoes used in ancient times.

MT TALAU NATIONAL PARK

The flat-topped mountain dominating the Port of Refuge, 131m Mt Talau (Mo'unga Talau; Map pp716-17), is protected in the Mt Talau National Park. From the centre of Neiafu, travel west past the rugby field along Tapueluelu Rd and up through a residential area for around 2km, until the road narrows into a bush track. When it begins to descend, a side track turns off to the right and leads steeply up over slippery rock surfaces to the summit, where you get a great view. There's a marked trail through the park (45-minute circuit) linking four viewpoints.

Activities

Offering boat-based tours, **Vava'u Surf & Adventure Tours** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71283, 12515; http://groups.msn.com/CafeTropicanaVavauTonga/), has received glowing reports from surf travellers for its laid-back surf trips (half-/full day per person T\$75/105). One incorporates abseiling into a sinkhole on Kapa Island and swimming out of Swallows' Cave (T\$130; p723). Surf/accommodation packages can be arranged.

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Vava'u's dive sites range from hard and soft coral gardens and encrusted wrecks to vast sea caves and other geological marvels.

Dolphin Pacific Diving (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70292; VHF Channel 71; www.dolphinpacificdiving.com) is a friendly operation on the waterfront beside Puataukanave Motel. It offers two-/three-tank boat dives (T\$140/200), snorkelling trips (T\$60) and runs PADI (Professional Association of Dive Instructors)/IDEA (International Diving Educators Association) Open Water courses (T\$550/500) and a great-value 'dive and whale-watch combination' for T\$180, which includes two tank dives. Sunset cruises (T\$40) and sole boat charters (T\$800) are also options. Snorkelling gear is available for hire.

Beluga Diving (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70327; VHF Channel 16; www.belugadivingvavau.com), on the waterfront at Fangafoa Marina, offers one-/two-tank dives (from US\$35/65) and PADI Open Water courses (US\$230). Snorkelling gear (US\$12) and guided boat-based snorkelling trips (US\$25 including gear, minimum four snorkellers) are also available. Check the gear before heading out on a boat.

The majority of boat tours and some whale-watching trips include a little snorkelling into Mariner's and Swallows' Caves or over coral gardens. Diving, fishing and whale-watching operators will run snorkelling trips out of whale-watching season for around T\$80. A good **snorkelling** day trip would be to head out to Mala Island Resort (p722) for lunch and snorkel from its beach to the beautiful Japanese Gardens nearby.

For more on diving in the Vava'u Group, see p74.

FISHING

Vava'u is regarded as one of the best game-fishing destinations in the Pacific and a prime site for catching marlin.

The Ikapuna Store (p721) in Neiafu is stocked with lures etc and may have fishing gear to rent.

Low season (January to April) reductions may be possible and most fishing charters listed here can be contacted on VHF Channel 71.

Dora Malia (Ikapuna Store; ☎ 70698; ikapuna@kalianet.to; PO Box 106) Two/four anglers for T\$600/800 per day.

Hakula Sport Fishing Charters (☎ 70872, 71381; www.fishtonga.com; PO Box 23) Boat charter A\$900 for up to six anglers. Operated by Hakula Lodge (p719).

Target One (☎ /fax 70647; www.visitvavau.com/target1; Private Bag 3) Charters US\$500/600/700 for two/three/four anglers.

Ika Lahi Lodge (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70611; www.tongafishing.com; PO Box 24) Based on Hunga Island, charters NZ\$800/1400 per half-/full day, maximum four anglers.

SAILING & BOATING

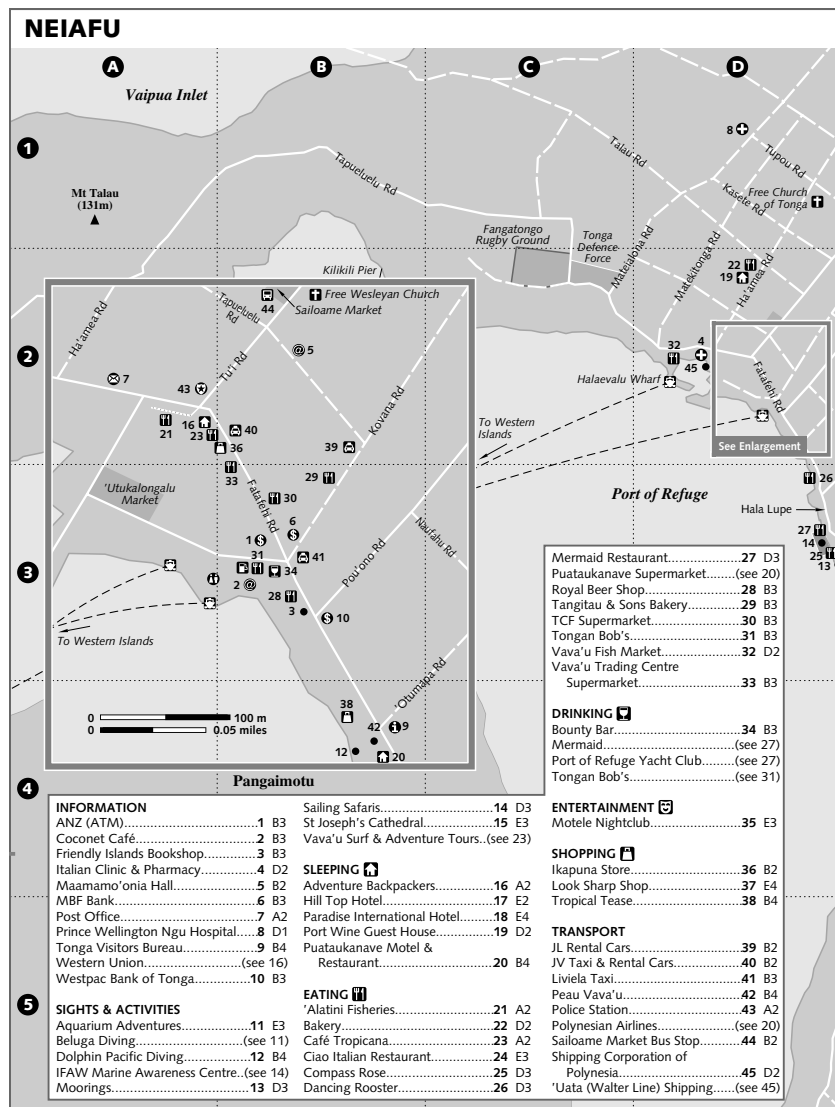
This is the perfect way to experience Vava'u: cruising the islands and stopping off to snorkel and wander beaches at will.

Down the steps from the cliff, **Moorings** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70016; VHF Channel 72; www.southpacificsailing.com, www.moorings.co.nz) charters out catamarans and monohulls ranging from 12m to 15m, which sleep up to 10 passengers. Prices vary according to the season, but range from NZ\$480 to NZ\$1450 for bare-boat charters during high season. Additional costs for a skipper/cook/guide are NZ\$170/140/140 plus food per day. Check its websites for details and book direct.

Melinda Sea Adventures (☎ 70975, 70861; VHF Channel 16; www.sailtonga.com) operates the traditionally rigged gaff ketch, *Melinda*, a beautiful sight under sail in Vava'u. Fully crewed, minimum three-day charters (two to four guests) cost US\$175 per person per day. Day trips (whole boat charter US\$350) and whale watching are also available.

SY Impetuous (www.sailtonga.com) is a fully crewed 15.5m Beneteau available for day sails around Vava'u (up to 10 people) and flexible longer charters, including pick-up/drop-off in Ha'apai, Nuku'alofa, Fiji or Samoa. Fully catered charters cost US\$190 per person per day for a maximum of six people in three double cabins. There's a dive compressor on board.

Down the steps from the cliff, near Moorings, **Sailing Safaris** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70650; VHF Channel 68; sailingsafaris@kalianetvav.to; www.sailing safaris.com; PO Box 46, Neiafu) rents out an 8m yacht



(bare boat/skippered from US\$150/250 per day) and also runs five-day live-aboard sailing courses for US\$1500 (up to two people). Skipped speedboats are available for US\$300 per day.

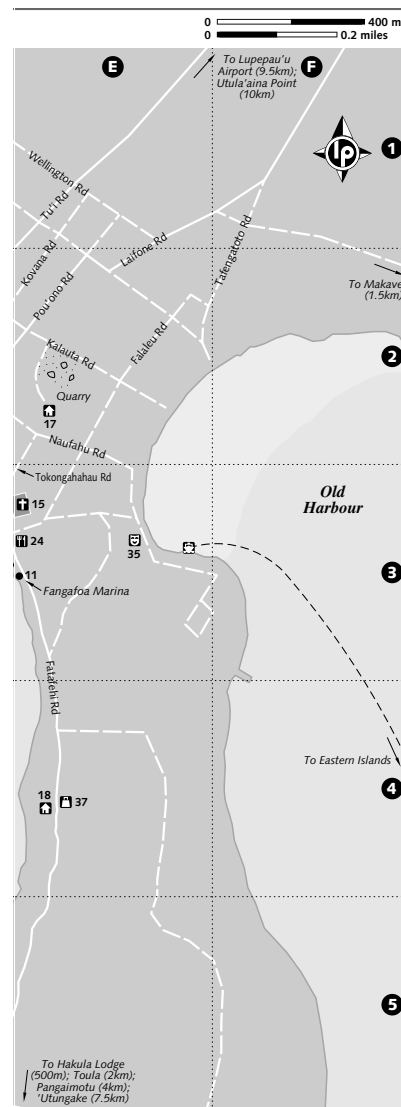
Coconut Café (see p714) rents small power boats (half-/full day T\$70/80) and **Aquarium Adventures** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70493;

aquariumadventures@yahoo.com; Fangafoa Marina) hires out sailing dinghies (hour/day T\$25/125).

See p718 for boat tours.

SEA KAYAKING

Island resorts and beachside accommodation places generally provide kayaks for guest use.



On the waterfront at Fangafoa Marina, **Beluga Diving** (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70327; VHF Channel 16; www.belugadivingvavau.com) rents out single/double sea kayaks for US\$20/30 per day, while Adventure Backpackers (p719) has nonocean-going kayaks for T\$30.

Friendly Islands Kayak Company (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70173; VHF Channel 71; www.fikco.com; Private

Bag 10, Neiafu; ☎ Jun-Dec), next door to Hakula Lodge, has been revealing some of Tonga's magic to kayaking adventurers on its camping and paddling expeditions around Vava'u (and Ha'apai) since 1991. This environmentally conscious company provides truly unique experiences (and supplies excellent equipment) on five-/nine-/eleven-day packages (with four/six/eight days of guided kayaking) for US\$900/1790/2130. Action-packed Adventure Week (US\$1570), falling between May and February, includes sea kayaking, whale watching, mountain biking and sailing or diving.

WHALE WATCHING

Vava'u has become one of the world's top whale-watching destinations, particularly due to the opportunity to swim with humpbacks. The activity is not without controversy (see p718), and **Whales Alive** (www.whalesalive.org.au) is an organisation devoted to the whales' protection.

Ecologically sensitive **Whale Discoveries** (☎ /fax 70173; VHF Channel 71; www.whalediscoveries.com; Private Bag 10, Neiafu) watches rather than swims with the whales, but provides snorkelling gear for use elsewhere on its day trips (US\$82 including lunch and drinks).

Diving operators (see p715) often fit whale watching between dives. At the time of writing, the uniform rate for whale watching (and swimming) was T\$150 with the following companies:

Melinda Sea Adventures (☎ 70975, 70861; VHF Channel 16; www.sailtonga.com) Combined sailing, snorkelling and whale watching (including lunch).

Sailing Safaris (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70650; VHF Channel 68; www.sailingsafaris.com; PO Box 153) On hydrophone-equipped *Whale Song*.

Whale Watch Vava'u (☎ 70747; VHF Channel 77; www.mounuisland.com) An enviable reputation and uncanny knack for finding whales.

Whales in the Wild (Map p713; ☎ 71381, 70872; VHF Channel 71; www.whales-in-the-wild.com) A friendly operation, run by Hakula Lodge (p719), with special family rates. Swimmers/nonswimmers T\$150/120.

YACHT RACES

On a balmy Friday afternoon you can't beat knocking back an Ikale or rum and watching a relaxed yacht race around the Port of Refuge. If you want to become 'rail meat' (crew), turn up to the Port of Refuge Yacht Club (at The Mermaid) when

WHALE ENCOUNTERS

Nothing compares to the experience of dangling midwater, staring into an azure abyss near a massive humpback whale. It might be a mother keeping a watchful eye and fin over its playful and curious calf or a lone singing male sending vibrating soundwaves through your chest. Some get very 'hippy' about it, with exclamations of, 'It changed my life...', 'It looked right into my eye...' or, 'It looked into my soul'. Others grow very quiet. Many men even shed tears. It's mesmerising, it's exhilarating, and to be honest, it's a bit scary too. Ask anyone who has been a bit too close to those graceful and smooth-looking fins: they have incredible force and their barnacle encrustations can cut like razors. Many visitors are content to marvel from the water's surface.

Tonga is an important breeding ground for humpback whales, which migrate to Tongan waters between June and November; it's one of the best places in the world to see these magnificent creatures. They can be seen bearing young in the calm reef-protected ocean, caring for new calves (conceived here 11 months earlier), and engaging in elaborate mating rituals.

Dubbed 'singing whales' because the males sing during courtship routines, the low notes of humpback 'songs' can reach 185 decibels and carry 100km through the open ocean. Humpbacks are also known for their dramatic antics in the water. They 'breach' (throw themselves completely out of the water), 'spyhop' (stand vertically upright above the water's surface), 'barrel roll' (splash the water with their long pectoral fins), and perform other remarkable acrobatic feats.

As Tonga's whale-watching industry has grown, so has concern over its possible impact. At the centre of the debate is the practice of swimming with whales, which some say disturbs the mothers and calves just when they are most vulnerable – and may force them to abandon the area before they are ready.

The Ministry of Fisheries has a useful, detailed leaflet, *Whale Watching in Tonga*, providing strict guidelines for whale-watching boats, planes and swimmers. Whale-watching operators should take their cue from the whales: if they seem disturbed and want to get away from the boat, then they should not be pursued.

Humpback populations around the world have declined rapidly over the past 200 years, from 150,000 in the early 1800s to an estimated 12,000 today. The same predictable migration habits that once made the giants easy prey for whalers nowadays make them easy finds for whale watchers.

the skippers meet at around 4pm between May and December. Spectators can watch from the bar at the 5pm race start. The only requirement for membership of the yacht club is arrival in Tonga on a yacht or launch (the MV 'Olovaha' doesn't count!).

Tours

Vava'u's terrestrial attractions don't need expert knowledge to explore – a taxi or bicycle can do the job. Inquire at the TVB, or see the following for boat tours.

Several Neiafu fishing, diving, whale-watching and sailing operators run day boat excursions that typically include Swallows' and Mariner's Caves, picnicking on an uninhabited island and snorkelling at an off-shore reef, but they'll also cater to individual whims. The presence of humpback whales (June to November) is a special bonus.

Soki's Island Tours (contact the TVB) runs tailored boat tours (T\$50, minimum

three people) that can include snorkelling and fishing.

Hakula (☎ 70872, 71381; www.fishtonga.com) boat tours (T\$65, lunch T\$15), run by Hakula Lodge, explore Nuku Island, Swallows' and Mariner's Caves; snorkel the Japanese Gardens; and stop at Mala Island for lunch.

Sleeping

There's a good range of accommodation around Neiafu and its causeway-connected islands (see also p722). Boat tour operators (see left) happily collect guests from the jetties and beaches of their accommodation around the Vava'u group of islands.

Bookings are advised between April and December.

Check the notice boards of Adventure Backpackers (opposite) and the Mermaid (opposite) for details on rentals – some with stunning water views. **Bayview Vacation Apartments** (Map p713; ☎ 70724; 1-bedroom apt

per week T\$400), just beyond the Vaipua Inlet causeway, has well-furnished, one-bedroom apartments with Mt Talou views and a good swimming area down the hill. Book through Adventure Backpackers.

BUDGET

Bathrooms are shared unless otherwise noted at the following places.

Port Wine Guest House (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70479; portwine@kalianet.to; Ha'amea Rd; s/d T\$15/25) Relax on the veranda or in the breezy lounge at this homely, four-room guesthouse after a hard day's adventure. Guests can use the well-stocked kitchen and fill water bottles from the tank. Showers are refreshingly cold. It's in a quiet spot, just a few minutes' stroll from the centre of town.

Adventure Backpackers (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70955; <http://visitvavau.com/backpackers>; Fatafehi Rd; dm T\$24, s/d from T\$48/78, d T\$88) This central, modern hostel makes a handy base to spring into Vava'u's myriad activities and nightlife. Fan-cooled rooms are bright, clean and secure (if a bit sterile), there's an excellent shared kitchen and communal area, and a sun-soaked terrace. Hot showers in winter only. Book ahead.

MIDRANGE

Hill Top Hotel (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70209; sunset@kalianet.to; Holopeka Hill; garden/harbour view d with bathroom from T\$75/115) Harbour-view rooms enjoy sublime views over the town, Port of Refuge and neighbouring islands. Each room is spacious, tiled and fan cooled and has good beds (but thin, scratchy sheets). Arm yourself with a torch and antidog missiles for the night-time walk up Holopeka Hill (meaning 'Place of Gathering Bats').

Toula's Harbour View Motel (Map p713; ☎ 70687; marcella@kalianet.to; s/d/tr incl breakfast T\$75/ 100/125) The old Marcella Resort is set in tropical gardens, with a tennis court, south of Neiafu. A tree forms the central strut of the nine detached cabins, each with a veranda and quality linen. Opening off the motel's guest lounge is a bar/restaurant (see Pierre's Table, p720) with a pleasant view of the Port of Refuge. Its Québécois owners speak English and French and provide a relaxed, family atmosphere. You can swim off the wharf below the resort, or walk (15 minutes) to a beach (see p721). Taxis from Neiafu cost T\$4.

Puataukanave Motel (Map pp716-17; ☎ 74000; puashotel@kalianetvav.to; Fatafehi Rd; s/d with fan T\$85/110, with air-con from T\$100/120, waterfront deluxe/superdeluxe d T\$170/205; ☎ ☎) Oddly furnished rooms seem to get more austere with size, but the 'superdeluxe' waterfront rooms have kitchens as well as balconies. Negotiate for budget rooms.

TOP END

Hakula Lodge (Map p713; ☎ 70872; VHF 71; www.fishtonga.com; s/d/tr A\$150/175/210; ☎ ☎) The most attractive and atmospheric of Neiafu's accommodations, Hakula Lodge consists of two units opening onto a full-length veranda overlooking the Port of Refuge. Guests can head down the tropical garden path to swim off the private jetty, from where the owners' whale-watching (see p717) and fishing trips depart (see p715). It's 2km south of Neiafu.

Paradise International Hotel (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70211; www.tongahost.com; Fatafehi Rd; island/garden/harbour view US\$70/95/115; ☎ ☎) A sprawling place with heavy furniture and 'ma and pa' velvet armchairs in tired but clean rooms. The best feature is the swimming pool (T\$5 for nonguests).

Eating

Neiafu's dining options – Italian, Mexican, French, Swiss and pub-café-style mixed cuisine – are constantly expanding and you'll find lobster just about anywhere. Mala Island Resort (p722) accepts nonguests for meals and has a popular Sunday barbecue.

CAFÉS & RESTAURANTS

Café Tropicana (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71322; Fatafehi Rd; breakfast T\$4-16, meals T\$11-16; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Nab a table in the cool interior or slouch into a deckchair on the harbour-view terrace at this central café. Tasty options range from sandwiches (around T\$6) and burgers to Thai and Tongan dishes such as 'ota ika and otai (a rich, smoothie-like melange of tropical fruits and coconut cream). Pies, cookies and cakes line the front cabinet.

Tongan Bob's (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd; mains T\$16-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) A sand floor to sink your toes into and tasty Mexican staples to sink your teeth into. *Tostadas* (fried tortilla), enchiladas, tacos and burritos come packed with fresh pickings, or head straight

for the cinnamon and sugar-rolled banana *tostada* dessert. Cash only.

Mermaid Restaurant (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70730; VHF Channel 16; breakfast & light meals T\$4-16, mains T\$25-36; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Yachties tie up tenders to the pontoon while others wind through a pirate-like lair from Hala Lupe (Way of Doves) to the most popular spot in town. The extensive menu attracts plenty of repeat diners for bulging tortillas, juicy grills and the popular pizzas and seafood dishes. Saturday's barbecue includes fish and octopus.

Ciao Italian Restaurant (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71030; Fatafehi Rd; pasta & pizza T\$10-18, mains T\$23-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This provincial-style Italian bistro near the cathedral, serves authentic Italian cuisine, including pizza.

Compass Rose (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71167; VHF 16; Fatafehi Rd; lunch T\$8-15, mains T\$18-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Perched on the edge of Hala Lupe, with elevated views over the Port of Refuge, this small restaurant offers relaxed elegance and good food.

Dancing Rooster (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70886; Fatafehi Rd; mains T\$24-42; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Descend the stairs to the tropical garden overlooking the Port of Refuge and dine on dishes served with finesse from the Swiss chef. Portions are generous and options include rich local fish soup and lobster cooked any which way.

Pierre's Table (Map p713; ☎ 70687; Toula's Harbour View Resort, Toula; 5-course meals T\$27-68; ☎ dinner) Just out of Neiafu, Pierre's offers intimate dining on European-style dishes. Five-course meals start with lobster-topped hors d'oeuvres and finish with rich desserts and coffee. Main courses determine the meal price.

TONGAN FEASTS

Joining in on a Tongan feast is the best way to experience Tongan food – much of which is cooked in an *'umu* – and get a good dose of traditional Tongan music and dance. Contact the TVB or your accommodation for current feasts. Expect to pay around T\$25 to T\$30 and take plenty of smaller denomination *pa'anga* with you for tips.

SELF-CATERING

Neiafu's three supermarkets stock a reasonable range. **Puatakaunave Supermarket** (Map

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Paella (Map p713; ☎ 16310; VHF Channel 10; dinner & entertainment T\$50) Tapania Island's La Paella restaurant gets rave reviews for its plentiful paella and lively entertainment. Get there if you can. Landlubbers can get a boat pick-up from 'Ano Beach; taxis from Neiafu cost T\$10.

pp716-17; ☎ 70644; Fatafehi Rd), affectionately known as 'Pua', has refrigerated chocolate as well as wine, beer and spirits.

The best place for fresh produce is **'Utukalongalu Market** (☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-midnight Fri, 7am-noon Sat), close to Halaeva Wharf.

The freshest fish (around T\$5 to T\$7 per kilogram) can be found at the **Vava'u Fish Market** (Map pp716-17; Halaeva Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon or 1pm Sat). For lobster (around T\$18 per kilogram), head to Ikupuna Store (see opposite) or **'Alatini Fisheries** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70939), which is behind the market but down the cliff from the main road. 'Alatini also sells imported gourmet goods and delicacies, wine and beer.

The **Royal Beer Shop** (Map pp716-17; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Thu & Sat, to 2am Fri) sells beer, wine, vodka, gin and rum.

On Sunday afternoon, just follow your nose through town to the bakeries – the places to be. Among them, **Tangitau & Sons Bakery** (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd) sells muffins and *keki* as well as basic bread and rolls. The **bakery** (Map pp716-17; cnr Ha'amea & Talau Rds; ☎ closed Sun) produces a continuous stream of excellent scrolls, cinnamon buns, chocolate and fruit muffins, and pull-apart savoury breads good enough for a meal.

Drinking

Mermaid (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70730; VHF Channel 16) The home of the Port of Refuge Yacht Club and the first port of call for many, yachtie or landlubber. The Mermaid is always casual but picks up its party cheer in the evening. Happy hour flows from 4pm to 6pm, while changing nightly entertainment includes darts competitions, quiz nights and Friday's yacht race, which is followed by live Tongan music and dancing. It's hats off unless you want to shout the bar.

Tongan Bob's (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd; ☎ noon-late Mon-Fri) As laid back as a Mexican after siesta early in the evening, and festive as the night wears on. Nightly happenings include Monday's live Tongan string and ukulele band accompanied by a kava ceremony (kava T\$1; open to all), T\$1 tacos on Tuesday, and dancing when the tables are slid aside later in the week. Knock back an Ikale or margarita at happy hour (5pm to 7pm).

Bounty Bar (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70576; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat) A lively, very local place with karaoke on Tuesday night and live music.

The waterside decking at Puatakanave Restaurant (see Puatakanave Motel, p719) makes a good spot for afternoon drinks.

Motele Nightclub (Map pp716-17; Old Harbour; admission T\$3; ☎ Fri & Sat) When the town's bars call last drinks, this place, Neiafu's only nightclub, swells with the young and drunk. It's a bit rough; go in a group for more fun.

Shopping

Stallholders in 'Utukalongalu Market sell shell- and woodcarvings, weavings and coconut-shell bras, and other handicraft can be found in shops along Fatafehi Rd.

A couple of studios print stylish, surf-quality T-shirts.

Tropical Tease (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71271; enter off Fatafehi Rd) Features local artwork in *kupesi* (tapa designs) and Vava'u 'dirt shirts', and has a small book exchange.

Look Sharp Shop (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70757; Fatafehi Rd) Opposite the Paradise International Hotel. Sells its signature kava-dyed range among others.

For fishing supplies head to the **Ikupuna Store** (☎ /fax 70174; VHF 69; Fatafehi Rd).

AROUND VAVA'U

Sia Ko Kafoa

Vava'u Island is nearly bisected by the Vaipua Inlet, which separates the Neiafu area from western Vava'u. The two sides of the island are connected by a causeway and a road climbs to the village of Taoo (meaning 'Spear') on the western shore. Behind Taoo are the twin hills of Lei'ulu, used as a burial ground, and to the left past Lei'ulu, Sia Ko Kafoa. On the summit is an *'esi*, a mound used as a rest area by chiefs and nobles and a place where young virgins were presented to amorous chiefs.

'Utula'aina Point

'Utula'aina Point, surrounded by steep cliffs above a turbulent sea in the island's north, provides perhaps the most spectacular views on Vava'u Island. To get there, head north from Holonga village until you see a track that forms a fork. Head straight ahead from the intersection. It curves around to the left a bit and emerges into a grassy open area after 10 or 15 minutes. Bear right through the bushes, climb the short grassy knoll and you'll emerge on 'Utula'aina Point. On exceptionally clear days the volcanic outliers of Toku and Fonualei are visible. Look out for whales between June and November. There's also a steep track leading to a secluded beach 50m before the trailhead.

Makave

One of the most interesting beaches on Vava'u Island, Makave is easily accessed on foot from Neiafu along the shore of the Old Harbour. Walk past the entrance to Hala Tafengatoto and follow the shore east towards Makave village, the legendary home of a mysterious dark, giant people.

An hour's walk from Neiafu, on the beach below Makave village, you'll find an ancient **canoe mooring** beside an obtrusive rock and cave. Further east are the refreshing **freshwater springs** of Matalave.

Eme'io & Keitahi Beaches

Seldom visited, these two beaches in the island's east are a dramatic, rugged alternative to the placid western waters. Eme'io Beach is well signposted all the way from Neiafu and has an idyllic, shaded grassy area. Though swimming conditions are not ideal, the pounding offshore surf, high cliffs and seclusion make up for it. Keitahi Beach is not as pristine, but the views are more dramatic and there are good swimming holes at low tide. To get there, turn left at an unmarked dirt road about 750m before Tu'aneikivale village.

Toula & Veimumuni Cave

Near the southern point of Vava'u Island is Toula village. From Toula, turn left (east) following the path uphill past a cemetery. As you begin to descend to the beach, you'll see Veimumuni Cave in the bluff. Inside it are an appealing freshwater spring and swimming hole.

Pangaimotu & 'Utungake

'Ano and Hinakaua Beaches (Map p713), near the southern end of Pangaimotu, are beautiful and very quiet, with sheltered turquoise water, abundant vegetation, good snorkelling and a safe anchorage.

The long, thin island of 'Utungake is connected by a causeway to Pangaimotu, and the pleasant Talihau Beach is near its southern tip.

Overlooking the water in a quiet village at the tip of 'Utungake, **Lucky's Beach Houses** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 71075; luckysbeach@yahoo.com; Talihau; tent site for 2 T\$25, s/d fale incl breakfast T\$35/60, beach house T\$60/80, extra person T\$25) has a king-sized bed downstairs and a day bed upstairs. Rustic romantics will love the traditional thatched *fale*, with shuttered windows onto the beach, mosquito nets and hurricane lamp lighting. The tent site includes a tent and sparkling bathroom facilities. Guests can launch a kayak off the beach to explore the islands and paddle over to nearby Mala. Dinner is available (from T\$20).

Primarily aimed at the baby-boomer market on prebooked packages, three-star **Tongan Beach Resort** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70380; VHF Channel 71; www.thetongan.com; high season d & tw US\$160, extra bed US\$50; half/full board US\$48/60) on Hikutamole Beach, 'Utungake, has standard rooms, a lovely sand-floor *fale* bar and a restaurant. Bring reef shoes. Children under 10 stay for free and pay 50% for meals.

SOUTHERN VAVA'U ISLANDS

Mala

Just south of 'Utungake, the small island of Mala has a sandy swimming beach and a welcoming resort. The **Japanese Gardens** is a beautiful snorkelling spot between Mala and Kapa, though a strong current flows between these two islands and 'Utungake. Beware of a legendary cannibal god who reputedly lives on Mala and is said to capture and devour passing boaters.

Plenty of yachties file into the broad restaurant (open to nonguests; breakfast and dinner T\$55) and join guests for sundowners (happy hour 4pm to 7pm) at **Mala Island Resort** (Map p713; ☎ 71304; VHF Channel 16; mala@kalianet.to; dm T\$50, s/d bungalow T\$125/150; 🍷). Mala is an upbeat, welcoming place where some wild stories get exchanged (just reach for the occasional grain of salt!). The tapalined bungalows have creaky wooden floors,

beautiful views and plenty of charm, though remodelling is planned in the near future. There's dinner and dancing on Friday, a Tongan feast on Saturday, and a Sunday barbecue. Transfers from the airport and town cost T\$25 per person and the resort's boat can meet you at Talihau Beach. Low-season rates available.

Hunga & Fofoa

A large, sheltered lagoon formed by Hunga, Kalau and Fofoa offers excellent **anchorage** and impressive **snorkelling**.

Ika Lahi Lodge (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70611; www.tongafishing.com; PO Box 24; tw/tr/q NZ\$280/285/295, full board US\$60) is a fishing-focused resort (*ika lahi* means 'big fish, many fish'). It's handily close to the deep ocean, has four guest units with balconies and plenty of interest for nonfishing partners.

Foe'ata & Foelifuka

The island of Foe'ata, immediately south of Hunga, offers glorious white **beaches** (sometimes diminished by tides) and good **snorkelling**. There is an anchorage on the north side of Foelifuka, beside Foe'ata.

The ecolodge-cum-eccentric dream **Blue Lagoon** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70247; VHF Channel 16; www.foiata-island.com; standard fale d T\$160, superior fale for up to 4 people T\$280, half/full board T\$90/100) enjoys an idyllic beach position on Foe'ata. Each of the six large *fale* is uniquely constructed in its immediate environment from local materials and the food is some of Vava'u's best. (The language can be some of Vava'u's most colourful.) Transfers cost T\$130.

Nuapapu

Nuapapu is best known for **Mariner's Cave** (Map p713), a hidden cave at its northern end. An interesting phenomenon of this cave, caused by the swelling sea, is the fog that forms every few seconds, only to disappear again just as fast. The main entrance is a couple of metres below the surface and the tunnel is about 4m long; use the swell to pull you towards it, then exit when the swell pushes you out. Snorkelling gear is recommended.

Vaka'eitu

The small, hilly island of Vaka'eitu has secluded beaches on each side, a secure overnight anchorage and some of Vava'u's best

snorkelling in the nearby **coral gardens**. Check with the TVB for details about the island's Popao Village Resort (Map p713), which has stunning views over the islands from its hill-top position (a bit of a walk up from the beach).

Kapa

Kapa Island's main attraction, **Swallows' Cave** ('Anapekepeka; Map p713), cuts into a cliff on the west side of the island. It's actually inhabited by hundreds of swiftlets, and the exceptional underwater visibility makes it great for snorkelling. The water is crystal clear despite the floor of the cave being 18m below the surface, and the only access is by boat (unless you want to abseil in; see p715).

Nuku

A magical white-sand spit runs off the tiny, uninhabited island of Nuku, into gradients of turquoise and azure water. It's a favoured spot for numerous official functions, celebrations and private parties. Locals often paddle over from Kapa to collect a small fee from anyone who stops here. Watch the current at the western tip of the island.

Taunga, Ngau & Pau

Just south of Kapa, the inviting and sporadically inhabited islands of Ngau and Taunga have idyllic beaches with fine snorkelling and four good anchorages. At low tide, Ngau and Taunga are connected by a fine sandy beach. Ngau is in turn connected to the uninhabited island of Pau by a slender ribbon of sand that is exposed except at the turn of high tide. There's a superb anchorage in the bight of Ngau on the eastern shore.

'Eue'iki & 'Euakafa

The raised island of 'Eue'iki has easy boat access to the stunning white beach, and a coral garden off the southern shore. You can circumnavigate the island in around 45 minutes at low tide, and explore the caves on the far side of the island from Treasure Island Resort.

A sandy beach rings the north side of relatively small, uninhabited 'Euakafa. From its eastern end a trail leads through the forest and mango trees to the summit (100m), containing the overgrown tomb of Talafaiva.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Treasure Island Resort (☎ 12935; www.treasureislandvavau.com; d fale T\$150, full board T\$90) In a magical setting on the north side of 'Eua'iki, this resort's thatched bar/restaurant perches on a white, coral-free sandy beach. Solid *fale* with water-view balconies are spaced along the beachfront and feature firm beds, private bathrooms (check if hot water is now available), clam-shell soap holders and hibiscus flower adornments. Two family *fale* also have bunk beds. Guests can use the kayaks to explore nearby 'Euakafa. The European cuisine served at the restaurant generally features fish (the day's catch) or meat, and may be available to yachties if booked ahead. Return boat transfers cost T\$60. Bring your own snorkelling gear.

Mounu & 'Ovalau

A short distance southeast of Vaka'eitu are Mounu and 'Ovalau, two more of the perfect islands Vava'u has in abundance.

Vava'u's most elegant accommodation for those wanting privacy and their own space for contemplation is **Mounu Island Resort** (☎ 70747; VHF Channel 77; www.mounuisland.com; d fale US\$175, honeymoon fale US\$200; full board US\$70). It consists of only a few ecofriendly wooden *fale*. Pass through a humpback whale's jaw bones to the breezy restaurant and well-stocked bar. Island-to-airport transfers cost US\$60 and excellent whale-watching tours are run by the owners. Three nights minimum; no children under 12.

EASTERN VAVA'U ISLANDS

Vava'u's eastern islands are better reached from Neiafu's Old Harbour.

'Ofu, Kenutu & Lolo

'Ofu is a friendly island and well worth a day's exploration. Its surrounding waters are the primary habitat of the prized but endangered 'ofu shell – buying them will only encourage their collection.

The small, uninhabited island of Kenutu, just east of 'Ofu, has superb beaches, and coral patches south of the island offer good snorkelling and diving. There's an anchorage on the western side. The reef between Kenutu and Lolo islands, immediately south, is very dramatic.

THE NIUAS

The closest most people will ever get to the remote Niuas (meaning 'Rich in Coconuts'), in Tonga's extreme northern reaches, is picking up a first-day cover of Niuafu'ou's decorative postage stamps.

Tongan tradition remains very much alive on these three small volcanic islands and dress standards are very conservative.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Airlines Tonga Air Fiji (Airlines Tonga; ☎ 23690; www.airlinestonga.com) services Niuatoputapu and Niuafu'ou once a week, but flights are prone to change and cancellation. One-way fares are T\$250 from Tongatapu via Vava'u, or T\$129 from Vava'u.

Boat

The MV *'Olovaha* is supposed to make a return trip from Vava'u to Niuatoputapu and Niuafu'ou, then back to Vava'u once a month, but the unpredictable schedule is reliant on the weather and government subsidies. Inquire at the TVB in Tongatapu. Fares from Tongatapu/Vava'u to the Niuas are T\$81/48, and Niuatoputapu to Niuafu'ou is T\$36. Due to its volcanic nature, Niuafu'ou lacks a decent anchorage or landing site, leaving access reliant on the mercy of the wind and waves.

Most visitors to Niuatoputapu arrive on private yachts. There is only one marker and two range sites (which are inaccurate by about 5m) at the port. If you get the range sites to line up you'll run aground!

NIUATOPUTAPU

pop 1400 / area 18 sq km

Niuatoputapu (Very Sacred Coconut) has a squashed sombrero shape made up of a steep and narrow central ridge 130m high and surrounding coastal plains. Much of this is plantation land, with many archaeological sites hidden in the undergrowth.

The north coast is bounded by a series of reefs, but there is a passage through to Falehau Wharf; yachts anchor just northwest of here.

Most of the island's interesting sights can be covered in two days.

Information

Sleepy Hihifo is the Niuas 'capital' and home to a police station, post office and small store. Cash and travellers cheques can be changed at the Treasury, though they sometimes run out of cash so it's advisable to bring *pa'anga* from Tongatapu.

Sights & Activities

The island is surrounded by magnificent white beaches of remarkable diversity and is easily circumnavigated in seven to eight hours (11km return trip).

Boat trips, including to the nearby Bali Hai-like volcanic island of Tafahi (reputed to produce the best kava in the kingdom), can be arranged with local fisherman for around T\$30 per hour. There's good **diving** outside the reef, but no diving equipment is available on the island.

NIUTOUA SPRING

The cool, sparkling pool of Niutoua Spring flows through a crack in the rock just west of Hihifo. It's full of fish and great for a swim. If you intend to bathe at Niutoua, bear in mind that the spectacle of *palangi* will quickly draw an audience. Swim in baggy clothes with a minimum of exposed skin.

BEACHES & SWIMMING

The most beautiful beaches are on the northwest side of the main island and on **Hunganga**, the offshore islet, especially bordering the channel between the two. The reef is close in.

WESTERN WATERWAYS

Near Hihifo, a maze of shallow waterways wind between the islets of Nukuseilala, Tafuna, Tavili and Hunganga. At low tide, you can walk anywhere in the area by wading through a few centimetres of water. At high tide, the passages (especially between Niuatoputapu and Hunganga) are excellent for swimming.

Sleeping & Eating

Palm Tree Island Resort (☎ 85090; palmtreeislandtonga@yahoo.it; s/d T\$180/220, half/full board T\$35/50) The wood-trimmed beachfront *fale* on Hunganga provide a comfortable base for exploration or navel gazing. Meals feature lots of fresh fish and organic fruit and vegetables.

There's a dinghy shuttle to Hihifo or you can walk across at low tide. Snorkelling, fishing and walking trips can be arranged.

Kaloline Guesthouse (☎ 85021; s/d T\$20/25) Warm hospitality awaits in this Hihifo village home with a spacious lounge and mosquito nets over chintzy bed covers in neat rooms. Guests can use the kitchen or book meals in advance.

Excellent camp sites are on the west of Hihifo and the beach along the island's south coast, though you need to get permission first.

Bring your own food to the island as only limited groceries are available.

NIUAFU'OU

pop 735 / area 50.3 sq km

Remote Niuafu'ou resembles a doughnut floating in the sea, its water-filled caldera encircled by barren and impassable lava flows. During the past 150 years, Niuafu'ou has experienced 10 major volcanic eruptions, though there hasn't been any major activity since 1946. Niuafu'ou has no coral reef and no sandy beaches, just open ocean surrounds. Also known as 'Tin Can Island' due to a previous method of mail delivery, Niuafu'ou has a notably different dialect from Tonga's other islands (it's closer to Samoa), and its fiercely loyal residents have a reputation for toughness.

Information

Boil all lake water before drinking; locals are generally happy to fill your water bottles from their rainwater tanks when asked.

Money can be changed at the Treasury.

Sights & Activities

A track (taking approximately six hours) leads right around the doughnut-shaped volcanic cone and its splendid freshwater lake, **Vai Lahi** (Big Lake), which nearly fills the island's large and mysterious crater. Along the southern and western shores is a vast, barren moonscape of **lava flows**. On the northern shore, mounds of volcanic slag, lava tubes, vents and craters are accessible from the main road. Beneath this flow is the buried village of **'Angaha**.

Keep an eye out for Niuafu'ou's most unusual inhabitants: the **megapode birds**, which use the warm volcanic soil to incubate their eggs (see p558).

Sleeping

There are numerous excellent camp sites on the crater (especially on the lake shores), although camping will draw a lot of attention and curiosity. A handful of village houses offer guestrooms; contact the TVB in Tongatapu for details. Expect solar-powered lighting, communal cold showers and no refrigeration. Some travellers have stayed at (and have given good reports about) the Catholic Mission.

It's wise to bring all your food with you.

TONGA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Camping

Camping is generally discouraged in Tonga, and is illegal in Ha'apai and Vava'u unless it's part of a guided trip. But camping trips to uninhabited islands in Ha'apai (including volcanic Tofua) and Vava'u are easily arranged and thoroughly recommended. A few places to stay allow camping.

Guesthouses

In Tongatapu and Vava'u it is easy to find clean, well-run guesthouses, many of which will have cooking facilities. In Ha'apai, cooking facilities are the norm, but the room standard is on the whole a lot lower. Generally, expect cold showers. The average budget price is between T\$20 to T\$30 for a bed, a little more for a private bathroom.

Hotels & Resorts

'Resort' is a loose term in Tonga and although there are no chain resorts, travellers who don't require organised fun will find boutique-style accommodation with plenty of comforts in Tongatapu and its nearby islands, on Foa in Ha'apai and throughout Vava'u group. Many of these are quite eclectic, with an eco bent.

ACTIVITIES

Tongatapu's western waters offer world-class surfing, while surfers can access breaks by boat in Vava'u. Kayaking trips around Vava'u and Ha'apai rate among the top adventure activities in the world, with a mix of reefs, beaches, whales, uninhabited islands and cultural interactions in small villages.

PRACTICALITIES

- The weekly *Tonga Chronicle* is the official newspaper of the Tongan government and runs a couple of articles in English. The only English-language newspaper for sale is the *New Zealander*, a weekly published in Australia for New Zealanders.
- Tune into English programming on **Radio New Zealand International** (www.rnzi.com) at 15720kHz, 9885kHz, 9870kHz and 17675kHz; **Radio Australia** (www.abc.net.au/ra), with shortwave frequencies including 5995kHz, 12080kHz, 15515kHz, broadcast at Nuku'alofa 103FM and 101.7FM; and **BBC World Service** (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice), no direct service – refer to the East Asia schedule online. See each website for details on shortwave and satellite radio frequencies and listening via the Internet. Satellite TV is increasingly available in Tonga, while local TV is heavily religious.
- Tonga has both the PAL system (Australasia and most of Western Europe) and the NTSC system (North America and Japan).
- Power in Tonga is 240V AC, 50Hz. Three-pronged plugs used in NZ and Australia are OK here.
- Tonga uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

Caving

'Eua has the most dramatic caves in Tonga and plenty of sinkholes to delve into and emerge from on the roots of giant banyan trees. A visit to water-accessible caves is requisite on Vava'u, while the freshwater pool in 'Anahulu Cave on Tongatapu is a popular swimming spot.

Cycling

Flat terrain and generally slow driving make Tongatapu and Lifuka (Ha'apai) ideal places for cycling. Bicycles can be hired on Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai and Vava'u.

Diving & Snorkelling

Great visibility, comfortable water temperatures and sheltered waters create magnificent conditions for diving and snorkelling. Professional dive outfits operate out of Vava'u, Ha'apai and Tongatapu (including 'Eua). See p74 for a spotlight on some of Tonga's dive sites.

Hiking

'Eua's national park and plantation forest provide a varied terrain with some of the South Pacific's best hiking (and no snakes or poisonous spiders). Other good hiking venues include the Niua, Kao and volcanic Tofua in Ha'apai, and various islands in the Vava'u group.

Sailing & Fishing

Vava'u has some of the best game fishing in the Pacific. The group's idyllic, sheltered islands make a stunning yachting destination (May and November are the most popular sailing times), with various yacht charter options. Tongatapu also has a handful of professional fishing charters.

Whale Watching

Due to the incredible opportunity to swim with humpback whales in Tonga, the kingdom is one the world's top whale-watching destinations between June and November, when whales come to mate and bear their young. Vava'u is the main centre for whale watching, but there are also operators in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua. See p718 for more information.

BOOKS

Tonga Islands: William Mariner's Account by Dr John Martin (see the boxed text, p708 for more on William Mariner) and *Tales of the Tikongs* by Epeli Hau'ofa should be mandatory companion reading for anyone visiting Tonga. The former provides a fascinating historical background on many sights throughout the islands, while the latter is a collection of wry, satirical vignettes on life in 'Tiko' which gives the visitor an insight into the modern Tongan way of life.

Friendly Isles: A Tale of Tonga; 'Utulei, My Tongan Home; and The Tongan Past, by Vava'u resident Patricia Ledyard Matheson, all relate anecdotes of Tongan life.

Queen Salote of Tonga, written by Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, is a warm account of the queen's life.

Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern by Ian Campbell provides a very readable history of Tonga. With a clever play on the title, *Island Kingdom Strikes Back*, by Kalafi Moala, covers the more recent history (corruption, skulduggery and illegal arrest) in the kingdom.

Lonely Planet's *Samoa & Tonga* provides a lot more detail on Tonga.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are flexible, but usually run from 9am until 4.30pm, with most shops open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday (some close for an hour at lunch), and 9am to noon on Saturday.

Café-style eateries open early and restaurants are typically open from lunchtime until around 10.30pm, but those that double as bars can stay open until as late as 2am. Everything closes at midnight on Saturday and only those restaurants/bars that have accommodation are officially allowed to open on Sunday, though there are exceptions.

See p728 for public holidays that will affect opening hours

CHILDREN

Tonga is a great place to travel with children and there's plenty to keep them happy: swimming, snorkelling, beachcombing, cycling, kayaking, short boat trips, and visits to interesting sights and cultural events (especially Tongan feasts).

Accommodation with a beach or swimming pool may be all the entertainment you need. Some hotels allow children to stay free of charge, others have a reduced children's rate, and a few do not accept children at all. Inquire whether your accommodation can arrange baby-sitting, if required, as the small size and island location of some may make this difficult.

The larger supermarkets in Nuku'alofa and Neiafu are well stocked, and disposable nappies (diapers) and UHT and powdered milk are widely available, but sunscreen and insect repellent can be hard to find out of Nuku'alofa.

It's worth picking up some children's snorkelling gear before arriving in Tonga.

You'll need to bring your own child car seat and check that it clips into seatbelts.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tonga is a safe country to visit. There has been a rise in thefts in recent years, though these rarely occur against the person. Any attacks on *palangi* usually go hand in hand with late nights and alcohol. Brawls are common in bars – keep tuned for trouble.

There are a lot of dogs roaming around Tonga: most are either friendly or will keep their distance, but a few (especially when they're in packs) are aggressive. Pretending to throw a stone often discourages them.

In Nuku'alofa, cases of taxi drivers taking new arrivals to the wrong guesthouses are becoming regular, so make sure you get dropped where you asked to be dropped.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Tongan Embassies & Consulates

Tonga has diplomatic representatives in the following countries:

UK (☎ 020-7724 5828; fax 020-7723 9074; 36 Molyneux St, London W1H 6AB)
USA California (☎ 415-781 0365; www.tongaconsulate.us; 360 Post St, Suite 604, San Francisco, CA 94108); Hawai'i (☎ 808-953 2449; fax 808-955 1447; Suite 306B, 738 Kaheka St, Honolulu, HI 96814)

Embassies & Consulates in Tonga

The following foreign diplomatic representatives are found in Nuku'alofa:

Australia (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23244; www.embassy.gov.au/to.html; Salote Rd) High Commission.

Canada Limited consular services available at the Australian High Commission.

China (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24554; fax 24596; Vuna Rd) Embassy.

EU (☎ 23820; eutonga@kalianet.to; Taufa'ahau Rd) European Commission.

Germany (☎ 23477; fax 23154; Taufa'ahau Rd) Honorary Consulate.

NZ (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23122; nzcnuk@kalianet.to; Taufa'ahau Rd) High Commission.

UK (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24395; fax 24109; Vuna Rd) High Commission.

USA (Peace Corps ☎ 25466, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 23600; National Reserve Bank)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tongan families need little excuse for a feast, and each island group has an annual festival featuring music and dance.

The biggest is Tongatapu's week-long **Heilala Festival**, held in July. It celebrates King Taufa'ahau's birthday with parades, dance and sporting competitions, arts and music. The **Miss Galaxy Pageant**, also held in Nuku'alofa in July, is the flamboyant and fun international *fakaleiti* (see the boxed text, p690) competition, and is always sold out.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

As in most of Polynesia, homosexuality is an accepted fact of life in Tonga and you'll see plenty of gay men around, including those following the fine old Polynesian tradition of *fakaleiti* (see the boxed text, p690). Whatever lesbian population exists is much more under cover. Public displays of sexual affection are frowned upon, whether gay or straight.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to New Year's Day, Easter, Anzac Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day (see p829 for dates), public holidays in Tonga include the following:

Prince Tupouto'a's Birthday 4 May

Emancipation Day 4 June

King Taufa'ahau's Birthday 4 July

Constitution Day 4 November

King George I's Birthday 4 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Several Internet cafés in Nuku'alofa charge around T\$2 per hour. Access is generally limited to the main islands in other island groups, where high schools offer the best-value access at around T\$5 to T\$8 per hour (and the only access on 'Eua and Niutoputapu). Other operators charge T\$12 per hour in Vava'u and Ha'apai.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The website of the **Tonga Visitors Bureau** (www.tongaholiday.com) is a good starting point for travel information. **Matangi Tonga** (www.matangitonga.to) is like an online newspaper and has the best coverage of Tongan news and issues.

MONEY

Tonga is one of the least expensive Pacific destinations. Without including inter-island transport, strict budgeters could get by on T\$35 a day. Based on twin-share accommodation, midrange travellers enjoying a few

activities should budget on around T\$110 a day each, while top-end travellers would need a daily minimum of around T\$240.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted at many tourist facilities, with Visa and MasterCard the most common but these attract a 4% to 5% fee on transactions. There are ATMs with Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus facilities in Tongatapu and Vava'u. Western Union has offices throughout Tonga, and MoneyGram is represented by the Westpac Bank of Tonga.

Currency

Notes come in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 *pa'anga* (T\$). Coins come in denominations of one, five, 10, 20 and 50 *seniti*.

Country	Unit	Pa'anga
Australia	A\$1	T\$1.52
Canada	C\$1	T\$1.80
CFP zone	100 CFP	T\$2.12
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	T\$3.89
euro zone	€1	T\$2.53
Fiji	F\$1	T\$1.16
Japan	¥100	T\$1.80
NZ	NZ\$1	T\$1.28
Samoa	ST1	70 <i>seniti</i>
Solomon Islands	S\$1	28 <i>seniti</i>
UK	£1	T\$3.67
USA	US\$1	T\$2.01
Vanuatu	100Vt	T\$1.84

Moneychangers

Australian US, NZ and Fijian dollars plus British sterling are most easily exchanged in Tonga, but yen and euro are also widely accepted. Travellers cheques receive the best exchange, with a transaction fee of only 10 *seniti* per cheque, and all major brands are accepted.

TELEPHONE

Mobile-phone users can get simcards in Tongatapu through **UCall** (☎ 0800 222; www.tcc.to/ucall_main.htm; simcard T\$45 incl T\$10 credit, minimum recharge T\$10) or **Tonfon** (☎ 875 1000; www.tonfon.to; simcard T\$10 incl T\$5 credit, minimum recharge T\$5). UCall's service is more reliable. Mobiles need to be GSM 900 compatible and must be unlocked from your local operator.

HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of coffee:** T\$2.60
- **Drinking coconut:** T\$1
- **Bicycle hire:** T\$8 to T\$15
- **Lobster meal:** T\$26 to T\$36
- **Whale-watching trip:** T\$120

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L unleaded petrol:** T\$1.80 to T\$2.30
- **1.5L bottled water:** T\$1
- **355mL bottle of Ikale beer:** T\$3.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** T\$17 to T\$22
- **Sipi (mutton) curry:** T\$3.50

Tonga's international telephone code is ☎ 676. There are no local area codes.

Tonga's emergency phone number is ☎ 911. The international operator is ☎ 913. Directory enquiry is ☎ 910.

TIME

Along with the Chukotka Peninsula in far eastern Russia, Tonga is the first place to see a new day. Due to an odd kink in the International Date Line, Tonga is actually 20 minutes east of the 180th meridian, placing it 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Noon in Tonga is 3pm the previous day in Los Angeles, 11pm the previous day in London and 9am the same day in Sydney. In the Samoas, directly north of Tonga, the time would be noon the previous day! When NZ is on summer daylight saving time, Tonga and NZ share the same time; the rest of the year NZ is one hour behind.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN TONGA

The **Tonga visitors bureau** (TVB; ☎ 25334; www.tongaholiday.com) has offices in Nuku'alofa, Ha'apai and Vava'u.

VISAS

Most country's citizens are granted a 31-day visitors visa on arrival upon presentation of a passport with at least six month's validity and an onward ticket. Those intending to fly in and depart Tongan waters by yacht require a letter of authority from one of

Tonga's diplomatic missions overseas or the Immigration Division.

One-month visa extensions are granted at the Immigration Departments in Nuku'alofa, Ha'apai and Vava'u for stays up to six months. You'll need one passport photo for each extension (T\$46) and a photocopy of your onward ticket.

TRANSPORT IN TONGA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

From Fiji, Samoa, Los Angeles, Australia and NZ, access to Tonga is straightforward. Auckland (NZ) and Nadi/Suva (Fiji) are the most convenient connecting points. For overseas contact details for airlines, see p835. Flights are often full between December and February. Everyday fares are listed here but in reality can be almost 50% cheaper. The major carriers:

Air New Zealand (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23192; www.airnewzealand.com; Tungi Arcade, Taufa'ahau Rd)

Air Pacific (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23422; www.airpacific.com; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds)

Pacific Blue (www.flypacificblue.com)

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 24566; www.polynesianairlines.com)

ASIA

Air Pacific operates direct flights from Tokyo to Nadi (Fiji), which connect with flights to Tonga (Nuku'alofa). Air New Zealand has flights from Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Singapore and Hong Kong to Auckland, with onward flights to the Tonga. Most flights from other parts of Asia are routed through Auckland and Nadi.

AUSTRALIA & NZ

Air New Zealand, Polynesian Airlines and Pacific Blue operate flights between Auckland and Tonga for around NZ\$450 one way, though often considerably cheaper.

From Australia, Pacific Blue has two weekly flights between Tonga and Sydney (from A\$550 one way), with connections to other Australian cities. Polynesian has

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax is T\$25, payable at the airport.

one direct flight per week between Sydney and Tonga (from A\$650), but you have to return via Auckland.

Air New Zealand has daily flights from Australia to Auckland (from \$550 one way), with connections (often requiring stopovers of around five hours) to Tonga seven times per week.

Air Pacific flights from Brisbane and Sydney to Nadi (Fiji) connect with flights to Tonga.

Travellers should also be aware that ever-increasing code-share agreements mean that it should be easy to arrange through-ticketing from destinations across Australia.

CANADA & USA

Los Angeles and Honolulu are the two major gateway cities for travel between the USA (and Canada) and the South Pacific. The following are low-season fares.

From Los Angeles you can fly to Tonga once a week via Honolulu and Apia (Samoa) on Polynesian (from US\$1300 return), or once a week on Air New Zealand via Auckland (from US\$1050 return). The fastest way into the southwest Pacific is to take the Air Pacific (code sharing with Qantas) or Air New Zealand flights direct from Los Angeles to Nadi (both fly three times weekly) then connect to Nuku'alofa.

Return flights from Vancouver, Canada, to Nuku'alofa cost from C\$2500.

Air New Zealand offers direct flights from Los Angeles to Nuku'alofa (from US\$650 one way).

EUROPE

Europeans usually fly to the South Pacific via Los Angeles, Sydney or Auckland, then direct (or via Fiji) to Nuku'alofa. Air New Zealand has attractive fares from London or Frankfurt to Los Angeles, with connections from Los Angeles to the rest of the South Pacific. Air New Zealand's return fares to Tonga, via Los Angeles and Auckland, start from UK£1100. It also has London to Auckland flights via Singapore and Hong Kong.

PACIFIC

Nadi (Fiji) and Auckland (NZ) are the region's two major air transport hubs. Nadi is a 1¼-hour hop from Tonga, and Auckland is a 2½-hour flight.

Air Pacific flies between Nuku'alofa and Nadi twice a week.

Polynesian Airlines has three weekly flights between Apia (Samoa) and Nuku'alofa/Vava'u via Pago Pago (from ST\$670/450, one way). Air New Zealand flies between Nuku'alofa and Apia once a week.

Various air passes connect Tonga with the other Pacific islands. See p837 for more on air passes.

Sea

Most yachts come to Tonga on the westerly trade winds from the Samoan Islands. Ports of entry for yachts are Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu), Neiafu (Vava'u), Pangai, Lifuka (Ha'apai), Falehau (Niuatoputapu) and Futu (Niuafu'ou).

There's a charge for anchoring anywhere in Tongan waters, calculated by multiplying T\$1.80 by gross tonnage of the yacht. In Nuku'alofa, this is payable upon departure at the **Ports Authority** (☎ 23168; marports@kalianet.to; Queen Salote Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). Pay the harbour dues and then head to Customs with the receipt.

In Nuku'alofa, Customs is based in the **One Stop Shop** (☎ 23967; Queen Salote Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). The customs clearance fee in Tonga is T\$50 (an extra T\$5 if outside working hours). In Vava'u, pull up at the southern end of Neiafu Wharf and contact the **boarding officers** (☎ 70053; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). In Ha'apai, check in with the customs officer inside the passenger shelter on Taufua'ahau Wharf upon arrival.

To summon the harbour master and for emergencies in Tonga use VHF Channel 16 or, if you're in VHF range of Vava'u, contact the charter yacht company the Moorings (VHF Channel 72).

GETTING AROUND

Air

Flying is by far the easiest and fastest way to get around Tonga. There are no flights on Sunday and schedules are subject to change at short notice. It's important to tell the airline in advance if you have a connecting international flight so that you get your 20kg baggage allowance and don't get bumped off the flight (which often happens).

Tonga's two domestic services are operated by **Peau Vava'u** (www.peauvavu.to) and

Airlines Tonga Air Fiji (www.airlinestonga.com). Direct return flights between Tongatapu and Vava'u (adult/child from T\$210/155), and Tongatapu and Ha'apai (from T\$155/125), operate at least once daily. Ha'apai and Vava'u (from T\$100/70) are connected three times a week.

Boat

INTER-ISLAND FERRY

Several passenger freighters travel between the main island groups and trips range from almost pleasurable cruising with sightseeing and whale watching (in season) en route, to barfing hell-rides kept afloat with plenty of midnight prayers. In either event, consider it a cultural experience. The TVB website (www.tongaholidays.com) lists ferry schedules (prone to delay and alteration), which must be rechecked prior to intended travel. Economy (deck class) fares are listed here (children aged under 12 pay about 50%).

The main carrier is the MV *'Olovaha*, run by the **Shipping Corporation of Polynesia** (☎ 23853; scp@tonfon.to; Queen Salote Wharf, Nuku'alofa). It does weekly runs from Tongatapu (Nuku'alofa) to Ha'apai (Lifuka and Ha'afeva, T\$37, 11½ hours) and Vava'u (Neiafu, T\$55, 22 hours). Every couple of months it goes to the Niua (T\$81 from Tongatapu), but it is rarely able to land at Niuafu'ou.

The MV *Pulupaki*, run by **Uata Shipping Line** (Walter Line; ☎ 23855; uateline@kalianet.to; Queen Salote Wharf, Nuku'alofa), is a lot quicker (Ha'apai, T\$45; Vava'u, T\$60), but offers only deck-class travel.

The Church of Tonga's **MV Siu Pele** (contact Tiukala ☎ 25555; one-way fare T\$42) departs Nuku'alofa's Domestic Wharf at 9pm Monday for Pangia (in the Ha'apai Group) via Nomuka, Ha'afeva and 'Uiha, returning from 'Uiha some time on Thursday.

There are services daily (except Sunday) between Tongatapu and 'Eua on **MV Ikale** (Walter Line; ☎ 23855) or **MV 'Otu Tonga** (Tofa Shipping; ☎ 21326; 'Unga Rd). Boats depart Nuku'alofa's Tuimatamoana Harbour at 12.30pm for the 1½- to 2½-hour crossing, returning from 'Eua's Nafanua Wharf around 5am the next morning. The generally simple crossing can get rough. One-

way fares cost T\$20; tickets are sold on board.

OTHER VESSELS

Smaller islands off the main ferry routes can be reached by smaller boats in all island groups.

Car

Hire cars are available on Tongatapu and Vava'u. Hiring a car or van with a driver is another option; this can be done on both of these islands, and on 'Eua. You must organise a Tongan driving licence from the police, for which your only test will be to simultaneously produce your home driving licence, your passport and T\$17 cash.

People drive very slowly in Tonga. The speed limit is 40km/h in villages and 65km/h elsewhere and, except for a few budding organ donors on Tongatapu, it is faithfully observed.

Local Transport

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Minibuses and taxis meet incoming flights on Tongatapu and Vava'u, and taxis meet flights in Ha'apai. Many places to stay will organise airport transfers for guests.

BUS

Local buses run on Tongatapu, and in a more limited capacity on Vava'u and its causeway-linked islands, and Lifuka and Foa in the Ha'apai Group. Fares range from 50 *seniti* to T\$1.50 depending upon the island and the distance travelled. Passengers usually pay when they get off.

TAXI

Taxis can be recognised by a 'T' in front of the numbers on the licence plate. There are plenty of taxis on Tongatapu and Vava'u, a few on Lifuka and one on 'Eua.

Tours

Commercial island tours operate on Tongatapu and Vava'u and less formally on 'Eua and Ha'apai. The TVB will give good advice on the current operators. See the individual island sections for details.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Tuvalu

In a stunning approach from the air, the islets of tiny Tuvalu appear like a mirage in the vastness of the Pacific. Barely higher than the surrounding ocean, and capped with a fringe of coconut palms, it's easy to understand why rising sea level due to global warming is a major concern here.

Time moves at its own pace on the five atolls and four islands of this sun-stunned nation. The weight of heat requires immediate retreat to the shade; it's impossible to move or even to think fast. Change down a gear, and enjoy the lack of hustle and bustle.

Formerly known as the Ellice Islands, the huge changes in Tuvalu over recent years are nowhere more evident than on Fongafale, the capital of Funafuti Atoll. Cars are overtaking bicycles and feet as the preferred form of transport, and an increasing population density and move away from subsistence traditions are bringing other challenges. Meanwhile, you can join the locals by taking a nap in the afternoon before a sunset float in the lagoon. If time is *really* no object, venture to the outer islands, where life is even more laid-back.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel and bird-watch in the gorgeous **Funafuti Conservation Area** (p742), with its uninhabited islets, seabird colonies and dolphins
- Relax on remote **Funafala islet** (p743) and get a taste of outer island lifestyle
- Float the sunset away in **Funafuti lagoon** (p741), surrounded by a classic coral atoll with a stunning aerial view
- Sway and stamp along to **fatele** (p737), Tuvalu's unique and very exciting music and dance performances

Funafuti ★

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

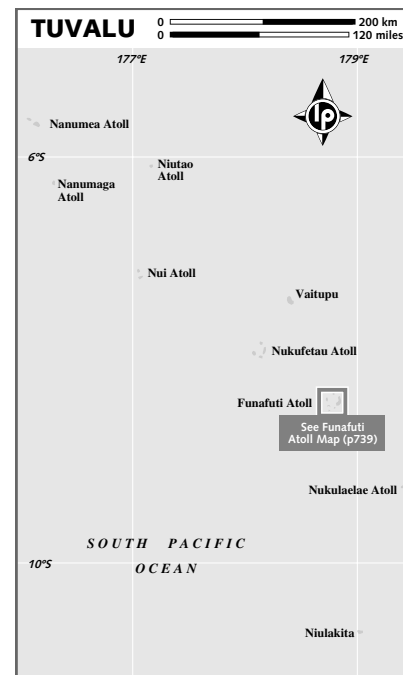
Tuvalu has a tropical maritime climate: the temperature rarely ranges outside 28°C to 31°C. Rainfall is high, up to 3500mm in the south (including Funafuti), and is usually brief and heavy; the wettest season is November to February. From May to October winds are light and from the southeast (the trade winds), changing to west-northwest during the November to April 'cyclone season'. While Tuvalu is considered just outside the tropical cyclone belt, severe cyclones do occur occasionally.

HISTORY In the Beginning

Tuvalu (too-*vah*-loo) means 'Cluster of Eight'. The *ninth* island, Niulakita, has been inhabited only in recent times. A proposal to rename the country Tuiva, 'Cluster of Nine', met a cool reception.

Polynesians settled Tuvalu around 2000 years ago, mostly from Samoa via Tokelau, but also from Tonga and Uvea (Wallis Island). The northern islands, especially Nui, were also settled by Micronesians from Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands).

Each hundred people or so were commanded by an *aliki*, a powerful chief. Under each *aliki* was a descending hierarchy in which everyone had their place. Each *sologa* (family) had a particular speciality or community responsibility – for example building, fishing, dancing or healing – and it was *tapu* (taboo) to leak this hereditary information to other families. Land was the most valuable asset and was passed down



through the male side of the family, with communal lands set aside to support and maintain those in need.

Outside Influences

Spanish explorers sighted the islands in 1568, but the first European contact wasn't until 1781, when Spaniard Francisco Antonio Mourelle landed at Niutao. In 1819 an American explorer, De Peyster, arrived and named Funafuti 'Ellice's Island', after an English friend who was a politician.

In the 1820s whalers and other traders began to visit the islands, and traditional Tuvaluan society began to change with the introduction of alcohol, money and new tools and goods. The *mana* (power) of the *aliki* disappeared as people lost respect for their leaders' often drunk and disorderly behaviour. While most *palagi* (pah-lung-ee; Westerners) lived peacefully with the islanders, many earned a reputation of being dishonest and possessive. This opinion worsened in 1863 when 'blackbirders' (slavers) raided the southern islands for labourers for the Peruvian guano mines.

TUVALU FACTS

- **Capital:** Funafuti Atoll; administrative centre Fongafale islet
- **Population:** 9500
- **Land area:** 26 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Nine
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 688
- **Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$)
- **Languages:** Tuvaluan, Gilbertese and English
- **Greeting:** *Talofa* (Tuvaluan)
- **Website:** www.timelesstuvalu.com

HOW THE ISLANDS FORMED

The Traditional Version

Tuvalu's islands were created by *Te Pusi* (The Eel) and *Te Ali* (The Flounder). Carrying home a heavy rock, a friendly competition of strength turned into a fight and *Te Pusi* used his magic powers to turn *Te Ali* flat, like the islands of Tuvalu, and made himself round like the coconut trees. *Te Pusi* threw the black, white and blue rock into the air – and there it stayed. With a magic spell it fell down but a blue part remained above to form the sky. *Te Pusi* threw it up again, and its black side faced down, forming night. With another spell the rock fell down on its white side and formed day. *Te Pusi* broke the rest of the rock into eight pieces, forming the eight islands of Tuvalu. With a final spell he threw the remaining pieces of blue stone and formed the sea.

The Scientific Version

After his Pacific voyages between 1835 and 1836, Charles Darwin proposed that coral atolls were built on slowly sinking volcanoes, while at the same time the crater edge was being built up by new deposits of coral. The subsidence theory explained why coral rock was found at depths far greater than the 40m at which coral polyps can survive (see p62). His theory was controversial at the time – others believed that reefs grew on underwater platforms raised by volcanic action.

Darwin proposed that a coral atoll be drilled for samples, and Tuvalu achieved scientific fame when the Royal Society of London funded expeditions to Funafuti. In 1898, after three 'boring' expeditions (see p741), scientists managed to obtain atoll core samples from 340m below the surface. When analysed, they showed traces of shallow water organisms, thus supporting Darwin's hypothesis. Not until 1952, on Enewetok in the Marshall Islands, was it possible to drill to a depth of 1290m (right through the coral structure) and actually reach volcanic rock.

They were aided by a resident Black American beachcomber, who coaxed the islanders on to the ship by promising knowledge of Christianity. The blackbirders succeeded in taking 250 people from Nukulaelae, and 171 from Funafuti; none returned.

Samoan missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS), who arrived in 1865, had even more impact on Tuvaluan culture. They ousted traditional religion while building on its influence, and began to dominate the *aliki* and take over their positions of authority and privilege. The Tuvaluan language was represented with Samoan orthography and sermons were delivered in Samoan. Use of the men's narrow, woven pandanus loincloth was suppressed. The quick, rhythmic dancing of the *fakanau* was banned by pastors, who regarded it as sexually stimulating and 'evil'. The custom of 'night creeping' – traditional nocturnal visits by courting males to their intended partner's house – was discouraged.

Colonialism

In 1886 the imperial powers of Britain and Germany divided up most of the western and central Pacific, each claiming a 'sphere

of influence'. Tuvalu fell within the British 'sphere', and in 1892 was incorporated into the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Protectorate. Thus Kiribati and Tuvalu (and later Tokelau), although ethnically and culturally different, were arbitrarily joined. Between 1900 and 1979 the British Phosphate Company (BPC) mine on Ocean Island (now Banaba, in today's Kiribati) employed an average of 200 Tuvaluans at any given time, on two-year work contracts. Others worked on the BPC phosphate mines in Nauru.

Laws imposed on the colony became increasingly strict and paternalistic. An authoritarian boarding school was established by DG Kennedy, a New Zealand (NZ) schoolteacher who arrived in 1923. He also introduced the *fusi* (cooperative stores) and radio, and served as district officer until 1939. In 1930 regulations were imposed on dancing, feasting, domestic animals and night fishing – even sleeping in an eating house attracted a fine.

WWII

During WWII Tuvaluan workers were trapped on Ocean Island and Nauru when the Japanese invaded. To prevent a Japanese

movement south to Tuvalu, US forces set up base on Funafuti and built airfields at Nukufetau and Nanumea in the north. More than 6000 Americans were based in Tuvalu, from where they bombed Japanese bases in the Gilberts, Nauru and the Marshall Islands.

The locals of Fongafale were shifted mostly to Funafala islet for the duration of the war. Funafuti was attacked nine times during 1943. Few people were killed, though there was one particularly lucky break on 23 April 1943, when many locals were persuaded by an American soldier to leave the shelter of the church, and go to the dugouts. Ten minutes later the church was blasted.

Postwar & Independence

Postwar changes were significant, with some islanders choosing to leave their overcrowded islands and use their war compensation money to migrate. People of Nanumaga shifted to Tonga and the Carolines; others moved from Vaitupu to Kioa in Fiji. The colony headquarters was set up at Tarawa in the Gilberts, and many Tuvaluans went there for work or study.

The union of the Gilbert and Ellice islands had always been a construct of British rule, and as the Gilberts' independence movement grew in the mid-1960s, Ellice Islanders, fearing that their more populous neighbours would have greater political clout, began agitating strongly for their own independence. In response to UN calls for decolonisation, the first House of Representatives was established in 1967. The Gilberts were allotted 18 seats, the Ellice Islands just five, but the Ellice Islanders retained a disproportionate hold on civil service positions.

In a 1974 referendum, Ellice Islanders voted overwhelmingly for separation from the Gilberts and in 1975, in preparation for independence, became a British dependency with its own government. Between 1975 and 1976 Ellice Islanders departed Tarawa en masse for their homeland; on 1 October 1978 the Ellice Islands became the independent nation of Tuvalu. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, represented by a governor general.

Aid money came flowing in, contributing to the hospital (1978), the deep-water wharf and cargo storage facilities (1981), and the hotel (1993). In 1987 Australia, NZ and the UK together contributed A\$24.7 million for

a Tuvalu Trust Fund. The country's trust fund has invested its nest egg wisely ('we don't want to be like Nauru', is a frequently heard warning), while hard-working seamen send their pay cheques home, and licences issued to the big Asian fishing fleets bring in another healthy stream of cash. And then there's dot tv.

Every country has a 'top level domain', the two letters which identifies it on the Internet. Even the US has one, although it's not generally used – a dot com is assumed to be in the US while a .com.au is in Australia, a .co.uk in the UK and so on. Lucky Tuvalu didn't get tu (Tunisia and Turkey were both in line ahead of it) – it got tv. In the late 1990s, when it was realised how much TV companies would pay for an address like CNN.tv or BBC.tv, the .tv Corp was set up and in 2002 it was sold to VeriSign for US\$45 million. Want to find out about Lonely Planet's TV plans? They're on www.lonelyplanet.tv.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

It's fair to say that most Tuvaluans are unlikely to suffer from stress. Life still revolves largely around family, friends, food and conversation; paid work is a necessary inconvenience, and the notion of efficient service in the hospitality industry hasn't quite caught on yet. Smiles are less evident than the local equivalent of eyebrows raised in greeting, so practice raising your own in return.

Many of the Tuvaluans who have travelled overseas for work or study have returned home; most are passionate about preserving island lifestyle and culture while still absorbing outside influences. Hence the trendy, shaven-headed young men playing footy or having a beer are just as comfortable sporting *fous*, the fresh headgarlands that many people wear as a matter of course, and dancing *fatele* (p737) in a *maneapa* (meeting house).

Lifestyle

Tuvaluans traditionally live in open *fale*, which have coral floors or raised wooden platforms. On Funafuti most homes are built in the Western style; these are less suited to the climate, but easier to maintain. People usually have little furniture apart from woven mats. Every few blocks there is a thatched *maneapa*, often used for song and dance

practice and card games, as well as for more formal community gatherings and church services; each of the outer island groups has its own *maneapa* in Funafuti. Protocol governs the *maneapa*; for example, no-one should walk in the inner circle, and the support poles have symbolic significance, with the sitting place at each reserved for important people. Sit barefooted and cross-legged, and avoid walking in front of people.

Women spend much of their time on handicrafts, especially weaving mats. When a *fale* is being built in the village, it is common for many women to contribute by preparing thatching material. Along the lagoon edge people swim, kids jetty-jump, and men walk in the water threading the fish they catch onto strings attached to floating coconut husks pulled behind them.

While much traditional culture has been retained, the family unit is being broken down as people are attracted to the cash economy on Funafuti. It is difficult to live by traditional subsistence fishing and agriculture in the high-density areas where housing is crowded, boundary disputes are common and squatter settlements are increasing. Stands of banana and *pulaka* (swamp taro) pits line the main road in the centre of the island, but these are small compensation for the 20 hectares of previously productive land now filled in by the airstrip. Most families eat significant amounts of starchy, sugary, fatty imported food, and alcohol consumption is on the rise, a diet which is reflected in growing rates of obesity and related illnesses such as diabetes. Average life expectancy remains relatively high though, with women living to 65, and men to 61.

One way to address these issues is by teaching people how to make informed decisions; education is highly valued, and schooling is heavily subsidised. The government high school is on Vaitupu, there is a church high school on Funafuti, and many Tuvaluans save or apply for scholarships to send their children on to further education elsewhere.

Population

Over 93% of the 9500 Tuvaluans registered in the last census are of Polynesian origin, and over 40% of them live on densely populated Funafuti, which currently has about 420 people per square kilometre over its

tiny land area. At the current growth rate of 1.7% per year, the population is expected to double in 40 years, and 36% are under the age of 15.

NZ has offered residence to Tuvalu's entire population in the event of catastrophic sea rise.

SPORT

If you get the chance, watch, or better still join in, a game of Tuvalu's unique sport, *te ano*. Almost completely incomprehensible to a first-timer, it's great fun and one of the few games that men and women play together.

To play *te ano* you need two round balls, about 12cm in diameter and woven from dried pandanus leaves. Two opposing teams face each other about 7m apart in five or six parallel rows of about six people, and nominate their *alovaka* (captain) and *tino pukepuke* (catcher), who stand in front of each team.

Team members hit the ball to each other with the aim of eventually reaching the catcher. Only the catcher can throw the ball back to the captain to hit back to the other team. To keep the game lively, two balls are used simultaneously. When either ball falls to the ground the other team scores a point, and the first to 10 points wins the game.

British journalist June Knox-Mawer visited Tuvalu in the 1960s and recorded her impressions of the game in *A South Seas Spell*:

Two teams of young men and women were playing a ballgame, facing each other like footballers. Back and forth whistled the ball, with the force of a cannon, hurled by the players to and fro as Amazonian figures leapt with outstretched hands to return it with a thwack, dark hair flying with outstretched hands to return it with a thwack, dark hair flying, muscular calves braced for the impact, or else jumped back to let it hurtle past. I was about to ask the system of scoring and so on, when Bwena remarked casually – 'The ball is a stone, you know, wrapped around with twine and a pandanus leaf.' After which I watched in open-mouthed silence...until victory was celebrated by 'our end' with a ribald send-up of a traditional dance.

'It was even more exciting in the days of our forefathers...the winning side would go mad. It was the proper thing for the sisters of the winning men to unfasten their skirts and wave them from side to side like flags, standing there naked before all the people [until]...the native missionaries from Samoa put a *tapu* on all competitive games.'

RELIGION

Church is the main event on Sunday, which is a day of rest. Most people (91% of the population) belong to the Protestant *Ekallesia Kelisiano o Tuvalu*, which is derived from the LMS. Seventh Day Adventists, Baha'i and Brethren Assembly each account for another 2% of the population, and there's a very small mosque for the tiny community of Muslim converts.

ARTS Dance

While 'twists' – discos – are the dances of choice for many young people, traditional dancing is still practiced and familiar to all, forming a central part of family and community events.

Handicrafts

Traditional handicrafts make imaginative use of limited materials. Pandanus mats (sleeping, floor and ceremonial) are highly valued. The creation of ceremonial mats is often competitive, producing imaginative, brightly coloured applied designs; sitting

mats take up to a week to make, while sleeping mats can take five to 10 weeks.

Handicrafts include ornamental stars, woven pandanus balls, model *fale* and canoes, shell necklaces, hairclips, brightly coloured dancing skirts and woven fans of varied design. Utilitarian items include baskets and trays, carved fish hooks and coconut-fibre rope.

Hand-smocked *tibuta*, traditional women's tops from Kiribati, are made and sold by the local I-Kiribati population.

Literature

The Cruise of the Janet Nichol in the South Seas, by Fanny Stevenson (wife of Robert Louis Stevenson) includes her impressions of Tuvalu in 1890; difficult to locate in hard copy, you should be able to find excerpts on the Internet. *A South Seas Spell* (1975), by British journalist June Knox-Mawer, recounts the author's stay in the 1960s with Tuvaluans on Kioa, in Fiji, and Funafuti. *The People's Lawyer* (2000), by Philip Ells, is an amusing and thoughtful account of a young lawyer's two-year volunteer stint in Tuvalu. *Treasure Islands – Sailing the South Seas in the Wake of Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson* (2005) by Pamela Stephenson is more 'dear diary' than storytelling, but she visits and describes some of the less-visited outer islands.

The library on Funafuti has a decent Pacific collection, and a small treasure-trove of dusty books on Tuvalu. The oldest (and most fragile) of these is *Funafuti or Three Months on a Coral Atoll* (1899), by Caroline

FATELE

Describing a *fatele* as a session of community music, singing and dancing omits the most important element – its competitiveness. At opposite ends of the *maneapa* (meeting house), each village 'side' encircles a square wooden 'drum' on which the men pound a background beat backed by drumming on a metal cabin-cracker tin.

Singers, male and female, sit cross-legged around the drummers, who start gently and build, the tempo getting faster and faster, louder and louder until it peaks in a thumping, crashing crescendo. The singing follows suit, starting softly and harmoniously and building to a full throated melange of harmonies and counterharmonies. *Fatele* means 'to multiply', hinting at that steadily increasing speed.

To one side of the musicians and singers are the dancers, often a group of very substantial dames with flower *fous* wreathing their heads and brown grass skirts. An occasional male dancer jumps up to do a little warriorlike, bent-leg knee-knocking, but essentially it's left to the women to sway statuesquely, only varying their dance with a graceful little 'so beat that' swirl at the end.

The other side tries too.

Martha Edgeworth David, wife of the scientist who proved Darwin's theory of atoll formation on Funafuti (see the boxed text, p734); it's of its colonial time, but her personal battle coming to terms with a strange environment and culture will ring a bell with many readers.

LANGUAGE

English is widely spoken. Tuvaluan is a Polynesian language related to Tokelauan. Tuvaluan uses 'l' where some Polynesian languages use 'r', so the name for a chief (*ariki* in the Cook Islands) is *aliki* in Tuvalu. When missionaries put the language into written form they used Samoan orthography so, as in Samoa, the letter 'g' is used for the soft 'ng' sound.

Tuvaluan basics

Hello.	<i>Talofa.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tofa.</i>
How are you?	<i>E a koe?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Malosi.</i>
Please.	<i>Fakamolemole.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Fakafetai.</i>
Yes.	<i>Io lo Ao</i>
No.	<i>Ikai.</i>

ENVIRONMENT Geography

Tuvalu's five coral atolls and four islands spread over 800km of ocean. Funafuti, the capital, is about 1100km north of Fiji, and the northern islands are about 250km south of Kiribati. With a total land area of only 26 sq km, Tuvalu is one of the world's smallest countries; the highest land is a mere 5m above sea level.

Ecology

Tuvalu's infertile atoll soils support coconut palms, pandanus, salt-tolerant ferns and some atoll scrub. Mangrove areas are rare. There are about 50 endemic plant species, and cultivated plants include banana, taro and breadfruit. Vegetation has an important role in foreshore protection but degradation is quite severe. Large tree species traditionally used for canoes and building are becoming rare.

Marine life is diverse, with dolphins and manta rays commonly seen in Funafuti lagoon. Green turtles breed in Tuvalu, and

hawksbills and leatherbacks are sometimes seen. There are breeding colonies of seabirds in the conservation area (p742), and in town you'll see fairy terns hovering low on the shoreline, and some waders at the water's edge. Dick Watling's *Guide to the Birds of Fiji & Western Polynesia* includes the 35 species seen on Tuvalu. There are no native land mammals, but rats, dogs, cats and pigs have been introduced as has the ubiquitous cane toad. Noddy birds are still hunted for food on the outer islands, though all wildlife within the conservation area is protected.

As an atoll nation, the major long-term ecological threat to Tuvalu comes from global warming (see p66) and rising sea level, but population pressures and changing lifestyles are more immediate problems.

About 4500 people are squeezed onto Funafuti's long, skinny 2.8 sq km Fongafale islet. Only about a third of the islet is habitable: large areas are taken up by the airfield and by enormous 'borrow pits', where material was excavated or 'borrowed' for its construction during WWII.

The most obvious environmental problem is the lack of garbage disposal. While traditional throw-away attitudes remain, there is an increasing dependence on imported packaged food. On a place this tiny, almost every tin can and piece of plastic ends up in the borrow pits.

Solutions are being tried. One possibility, for example, is that the borrow pits become landfill areas, with garbage compressed into them, some type of toxic guard-layer laid on top, and sand and soil dumped on top of that. (A vocal group of locals think that perhaps the Americans should help with this, and return the land they 'borrowed' during the war.) A can-crushing machine is operating on the island, and a small sum is paid for each can collected; hopefully these, and other scrap metal and battery waste, will eventually be bought by overseas recycling operations. On a smaller scale, sustainable community waste management is being promoted, with locals encouraged to compost what they can and to start gardening in an attempt to reduce dependence on packaged foods. As a visitor, you can help by arriving with as little plastic as possible, taking it out again with you when you go, and minimising your throw-away rubbish while in-country.

Trouble in Paradise, an international documentary made in 2004, provides a good overview of the environmental issues facing Tuvalu and local people's responses to them, as does locally made *Te Malosiga O Fenua: The Strength of the Island*. You can find the first at Motolalu Internet café, and the second at the Department of Community Services, both in Fongafale.

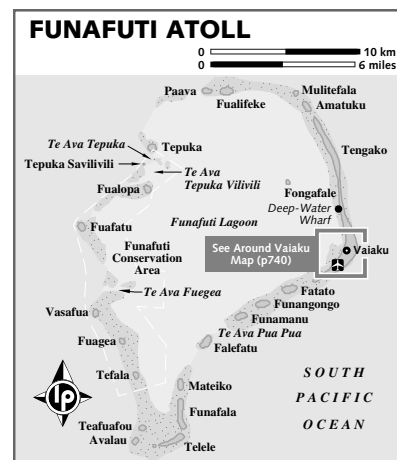
FUNAFUTI ATOLL

pop 4500 / area 2.8 sq km

Funafuti (foo-nah-foo-ti) Atoll is the country's capital, with the administrative centre and airport on Fongafale islet. The vast lagoon, about 24km long and 18km wide, has two small and two large *te ava* (reef passages). Pretty Funafala islet at the southern end of the atoll has simple accommodation, and the pristine marine conservation area on the western side is simply spectacular.

ORIENTATION

Fongafale (also spelt Fogafale or Fagafale) is the largest of Funafuti's islets. It's a long snakelike slither of land, 12km long and between 10m and 400m wide, with the South Pacific Ocean on the east and the protected lagoon on the west. The airstrip runs from northeast to southwest on the widest part of the island, with the village and administrative centre of Vaiaku on the lagoon side. The deep-water wharf is 1.7km north of the



hospital; the main road continues north and at times is almost half the islet's width!

INFORMATION

The following are all located in Vaiaku.

Internet Access

Motolalu Internet Café (Ground fl, Telecom Bldg)

Media

Department of Community Affairs (☎ 20815; Ministry of Home Affairs, Government Offices) Produces local documentaries.

Media Centre (☎ 20138; opposite Vaiaku Lagi Hotel) Publishes the monthly newsletter and broadcasts Radio Tuvalu.

Medical Services

Princess Margaret Hospital (☎ 20480, 20749) At the northern end of town. The pharmacy may not have a wide selection of drugs, so bring any medical supplies you need.

Money

National Bank of Tuvalu (NBT; ☎ 20803; 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri) Opposite airport building.

Post

The post office is on the ground floor of the government offices.

Tourist Information

Tuvalu receives few tourists – in a recent year only 154 visitors identified themselves as tourists.

Funafuti Town Council (Kaupule Funafuti; ☎ 20846, 20630) Arranges boats to the conservation area.

Government tourism officer (☎ 20408; fax 20210; www.timelesstuvalu.com; secfin@tuvalu.tv; Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning & Industries, top fl, Government Offices)

Lands & Survey Department (☎ 20836; 1st fl, Government Offices) Has detailed maps of Funafuti and the outer islands.

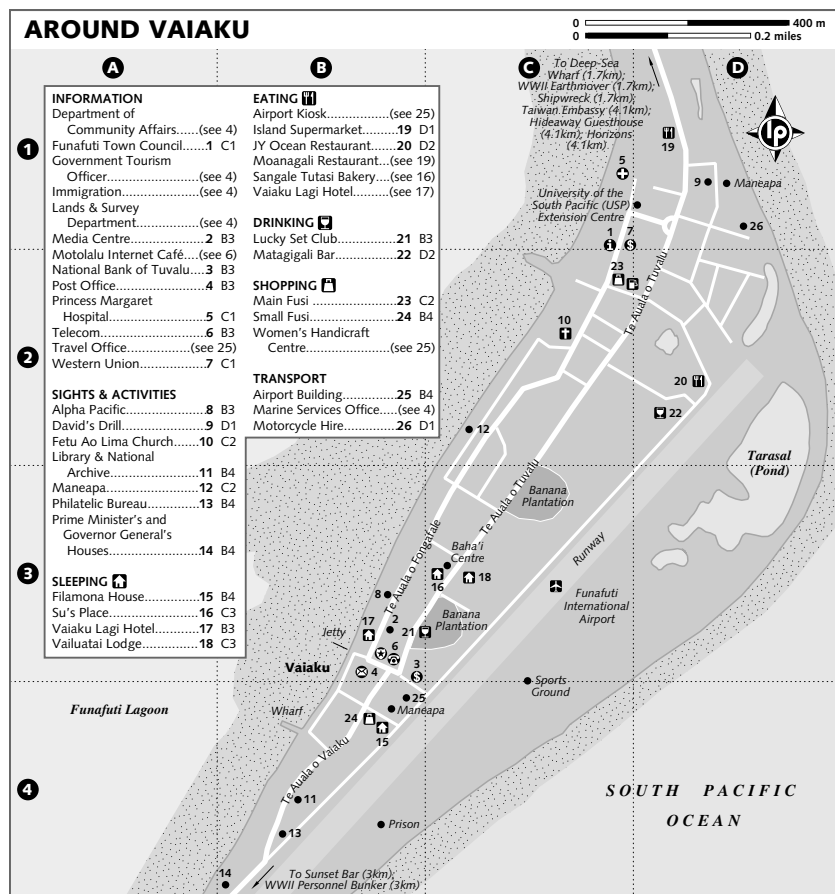
Travel Agencies

Travel Office (☎ 20737; fax 20757) At the airport; deals with ticketing and reconfirmation of flights.

TRANSPORT Getting There & Away

AIR

Funafuti International Airport's small wooden airport building was built in 1993 with Australian and EU aid. Air Fiji has regular flights between Suva and Funafuti (see p749).



There are no domestic flights between Funafuti and the outer islands.

BOAT

Funafuti lagoon has two reef passages that are large enough for ships to enter, and it also has a deep-water wharf north of Vaiaaku. The cargo and passenger ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* make occasional voyages to Fiji. For further information, see p749.

Getting Around

You'll find that it's often too hot to walk further than around Vaiaaku; motorcycles are the easiest option for getting around Fongafale.

BICYCLE

The motorcycle rental places may have the odd bicycle for hire, or ask at your accommodation.

BOAT

The easiest way to see the lagoon and some of the smaller islets is with the Funafuti Town Council (see p739). The council's boat costs around A\$100 for several hours, or negotiate with locals yourself. Don't expect life jackets or safety gear!

BUS

Fongafale's minibus service (40c for the length of the town) is more like a mobile disco! The service runs from about 6.30am

to 7pm (only on Sunday for church). There are weekday buses to the northern end of the island (60c), early in the morning and at about 4pm to coincide with school hours.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Cars are not generally available for hire, though you might be able to work something out informally. Motorcycles and mopeds are the most popular transport and are available for hire (A\$10 per day) from a place near David's Drill (see right); alternatively, ask around privately. Look out for the one wildly decorated (private) Filipino jeepney that careens around town!

TAXI

Taxis costs around A\$4 from the hotel to the deep-water wharf, and A\$2 from the hotel to the southern end of the islet near the governor general's residence. There are many private taxi operators; ask at your accommodation.

FONGAFALE ISLET Sights & Activities

Wander around town, borrow a bicycle or hire a moped to explore the islet, and don't expect much action in the streets during the hot hours of midday.

The **airstrip** is literally and figuratively the centre of island life; taking a walk, jog or bike ride at dawn and dusk is a must. On hot, still nights the runway resembles the massacre of the innocents as families decamp to sleep in the open. Sprawled motionless in haphazard groups, the scene gradually comes to life at first light when people carry sleeping mats, pillows and small children back to their houses. Late afternoons the runway is action-packed, with small groups of (mostly) men playing a variety of ball games, weightlifting or running, with walkers marching the perimeter, and cyclists zipping up and down between. It's also fun to hang around the fringes of the airport building at flight arrival times, with the fire engine sounding its siren to clear the runway, the food stalls beside, and locals farewelling and garlanding friends and family.

Towards the southern end of the runway are the neighbouring **prime minister's and governor general's houses**. In the garden of the GG's house is a carefully conserved

massive old structure looking a bit like a brick kiln; unsure exactly what it was used for, the general opinion is that it was maybe an early aircraft beacon. From the road you can see a very beautiful traditionally built **maneapa** on the lagoon side of the compound garden, the only one remaining on Fongafale; ask someone for permission to go closer and check out its intricate construction and thatching.

The tiny and book-stuffed **library and national archive** (☎ 20128; ☎ 8am-12.30 & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) holds an impressive Pacific collection and a small selection of works on Tuvalu; it's an air-conditioned and pleasant space to spend a couple of hours browsing. Next door is the **philatelic bureau** (☎ 20224; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri), which as well as displaying collectors' stamps sells a few postcards and (regular) postage stamps for them.

The vast **Funafuti lagoon** is stunning; floating in the lagoon's turquoise waters is a great way to start and end a scorching day, and it's clean enough. The concrete jetty just south of Vaiaaku Lagi Hotel is a good spot to enter; there's no live coral near shore, but there are plenty of small, pretty reef fish hanging around. Women should swim in long shorts and T-shirts, and men in long shorts. You may be able to hire **kayaks**; try calling ☎ 20200 or 20777.

In 1896 the first of three coral-drilling expeditions came to Funafuti to investigate Darwin's theory of atoll formation (see p734). Led by Australian Professor Edgeworth David, the expedition site known as **David's Drill** is at the northern end of town. It's commemorated by a concrete base, decorated with shells and an inscription, surrounding the drill hole; a small and unassuming memorial to the world's first scientific step towards proving how atolls are formed. His wife's diary, published in 1899, is in the library.

There are a few WWII remnants on Fongafale. Almost hidden under salt bush towards the southern end of the islet is an old **personnel bunker**, and near the deep-water wharf an enormous **earth-moving machine**, still bearing its American maker's plate, is quietly rusting away. The **wreck** on the lagoon shore beyond the wharf is a fishing boat, destroyed during Cyclone Bebe in 1972.

FONGAFALE BY BICYCLE Heading South

Take the airport building as your start point and head south along the runway road. Stop at the **prime minister's and governor general's houses** (p741); with luck, someone will invite you to look at the grounds. Continue straight down the road, enjoy the domestic scenes in the households you pass, and imagine the island before the eyesore 'borrow pits' existed. At the end of the road – perhaps 3km from the airport – follow the bush track and emerge at the end of Fongafale, where ocean and lagoon meet. Heading back, stop at the **Sunset Bar** (p382) for a cold drink; if it looks closed, go around the back and ask.

Returning, veer left off the runway road onto Vaiaku Rd; pass the **philatelic bureau** (p741) and cool off in the **library** (p741). Stay on this road back to the airport.

Heading North

From the airport, cycle past **Vaiaku Lagi Hotel** (opposite). Continue along this road and note Fetu Ao Lima church, rebuilt on the site of the church destroyed in WWII. Passing the area around the *fusi* and hospital, you'll end up on the main (and only) road heading north. Look out for the massive WWII **earth-mover** (p741) on the right side of the road, check out the action at the deep-water wharf (chaotic if a boat's arriving or departing), and the **wreck** (p741) in the lagoon.

Beyond the wharf you can cycle on for another 4km or so to the northern end of Fongafale; this is where the scheme to land-fill the borrow pits is being tried. You'll pass quiet households, a couple of guesthouses

and beach picnic spots, and can collapse gratefully at **Horizons** (p744) beach bar or at the kiosk beside the secondary school for a drink.

On the way home, turn left after the Island Supermarket and at the bend on the road, opposite a *maneapa*, is **David's Drill** (p741) site at ground level. Weave your way back to the *fusi* if you need to shop, or head over to the end of the runway for refreshment and a sit-down at **Jimmy's** (JY Ocean Restaurant, p744).

AROUND FUNAFUTI

Try to make time to visit the gorgeous Funafuti Conservation Area (below), about a half-hour motorboat ride across the lagoon. If you book through the town council, it will cost you a flat fee of A\$100 for a return boat trip (maximum 12 people), including time on one or two of the islets. The length of time you'll be out, and where you'll go, largely depends on the weather. There's an A\$50 fee per person for those taking photographs; commercial photographers pay more. This may seem expensive, but it's about the only revenue the conservation area gets, and it needs it. Safety equipment on the boat is likely to be limited or non-existent, and you'll need to take your own snorkel gear; there is no diving.

Just outside the northern boundary of the conservation area is **Tepuka islet**. There's good snorkelling at its southern end, decent beaches and some WWII relics in the centre (you'll need directions to find them). Ask around for private boat operators to take you out there (try Eti at the Alpha Pacific

office near the Media Centre; ☎ 20900); you'll pay around A\$80 for a return trip.

Beautiful **Funafala islet** is at the southern end of the atoll. When the Americans took over Fongafale in WWII, the villagers were relocated here; most moved back after the war, but there is still a small community here. It is a lovely, remote place, and the more traditional village lifestyle gives a taste of what the outer islands are like. Funafala is about one hour by boat from Vaiaku (see p740); the town council's boat will cost A\$100 return but double this if you're staying overnight (see right), as it will have to make two return trips.

Amatuku islet is about 10km north of Vaiaku. A boys' mission school was started here in the late 1890s, before being transferred to Vaitupu. The Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute was established here in 1979, relatively isolated in order to simulate ship operations. About 60 Tuvaluans train as seamen each year, and have a good reputation with international shipping companies. Most send their wages back to their families, and their remittances are an important part of Tuvalu's economy.

SLEEPING

There's a small but adequate selection of accommodation on Fongafale that includes a hotel, a lodge and several family-run guesthouses. There's also a basic guesthouse on Funafala islet.

Filamona House (☎ 20983; s/d incl breakfast A\$60/70; ☎) Conveniently located across from the Vaiaku *maneapa* by the airport. This family-run lodge has two small, dark rooms downstairs and three upstairs, one of which can become a three-bed 'dormitory' for A\$45 per person. There's a communal lounge, basic kitchen and a veranda upstairs overlooking the runway.

Family guesthouses can be a more economical option although sometimes room availability depends on whether family are visiting, and quality often dips if owners are overseas. Staying at a guesthouse will give you a better idea of how local people live, and a better sense of Tuvalu's traditions of neighbourliness and extended family. You'll probably also need to put aside any need you might have for privacy, and to be prepared for noisy and hot nights! Expect to pay around A\$40 for a single room with fan,

shared bathroom and kitchen. In town try Su's Place and Vailuatai Lodge; ask locally for other possibilities.

Hideaway Guesthouse (☎ 20365; tufha@tuvalu.tv; s/d with fan A\$33/44, apt A\$55; ☎) Out of town, this three-room guesthouse is one of several places towards the northern end of Fongafale. It's a bit rundown, but the family is friendly, the apartment is a good size and has cooking facilities, and there are two basic fan-cooled rooms with bathrooms. There are regular minibuses to the deep-water wharf, from where it's 2.5km (about a half-hour walk) to the guesthouse; on weekdays there is a morning and late afternoon bus service to the door. There's no sign, so look for the fence and satellite dish of the Taiwanese ambassador's house. The guesthouse is next door.

Continuing to head north, other options are three air-conditioned rooms in a two-storey house opposite Horizons bar (ask there for information), and two simple beach houses on the lagoon at the northern end of the island (ask about these at the Funafuti Town Council).

Funafala Islet Guesthouse (Funafala; beds A\$15) This tiny fibro place has two beds, louvre windows and solar electricity, but no mosquito screens. It's next to a *maneapa* on the water's edge and has a toilet block and water tank. Take your own food (as there are no shops) and a good read. You'll need to book in person and pay in advance at Funafuti Town Council.

EATING

Vaiaku Lagi Hotel (meals A\$3-6; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner). Go for the fresh fish options here. The food is fine, but you'll be looking forward

FUNAFUTI CONSERVATION AREA

If you've ever indulged in a desert-island fantasy, now's your chance to visit one for real. The five islets of the Funafuti Conservation Area are strung in a necklace along the western side of the atoll; all are uninhabited and – with the consent of the landowners – are protected as no fishing, no hunting, no gathering areas. The islets, varying in size from small to tiny, are fringed with white sand, sport a dense cluster of native forest and palm trees and are alive with the noise and activity of colonies of seabirds; one of the joys of stepping ashore is finding yourself eyeball to eyeball with an exquisite and curious fairy tern hovering in front of you. Green turtles nest on the beaches, and while much of the coral close to shore has suffered from bleaching, it still provides a home for many species of brilliantly coloured reef fish. Until 2005 there were six islets, but an exceptional storm and surge destroyed tiny Tepuka Savilivili, giving an unsettling taste of what might happen to Tuvalu as global warming progresses.

The conservation area, initiated in 1996, covers 33 sq km of lagoon, reef, channel, ocean and island habitats. It's open to visitors for snorkelling, walking, picnicking and bird-watching.

to some variety after a few days. Vegetarians can expect to live on the omelette option; if you don't eat eggs, bring your own food. You can eat at the edge of the lagoon, and it's a lovely spot to relax.

JY Ocean Restaurant (meals A\$4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) An old favourite, Kai Restaurant has moved location and changed its name to JY Ocean Restaurant, but is known locally to everyone as 'Jimmy's'. It's now on the corner at the northern end of the runway in a cool setting that gets the ocean breeze, and remains a popular gathering place for a wide range of Chinese-style food and cold beer and wine.

Moanagali Restaurant (meals from A\$3) Beside the Island Supermarket. The Chinese cook prepares good simple food to order; the fresh fish soup (ask for an addition of seaweed) is delicious. The setting's hot and uninviting and you won't want to linger, but many locals reckon it's the best food in town. There are several other rice and noodle places dotted around.

Airport Kiosk (Airport Bldg; sandwiches A\$2, toddy 50c) Serves great sandwiches, with coleslaw and salad adding to the fillings; vegos will need to go for the omelette burger option. Try their cold fresh (nonalcoholic) toddy as a refreshing drink. You can often buy roti – a Tuvaluan version of the popular Fijian snack of filled Indian bread – from the kiosk or from roadside sellers by the airport.

Sangale Tutasi Bakery, just north of the airport, makes good bread.

Food in general – and fresh food in particular – can be pretty scarce if the supply boat has been delayed; bring a stash of goodies if there's anything you can't do without, and be prepared to lower your intake of vitamins and roughage for the duration.

DRINKING

Nightlife in Funafuti happens Thursday to Saturday, with loud and wildly popular 'twists' (discos) taking place at the raucous **Matagigali Bar** (☎ 8pm till late) and **Lucky Set Club** (☎ 8pm till late). Tuvaluan enjoy a beer or several, and – like anywhere – an aggressive drunk is not a pretty sight; women visitors should think twice about going out alone, and it's wise to avoid figure-hugging clothes.

Out of town, Sunset Bar and Horizons, at the southern and northern ends of the island

respectively, are local drinking haunts and good for a sundowner if you're passing by.

SHOPPING

Fongafale has few shops.

Women's Handicraft Centre (Airport Bldg; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri & for flights) This place sometimes only has shell necklaces and cane baskets, but occasionally it stocks good-quality items of traditional design in natural materials.

Local craftswomen also have stalls set up near the Funafuti airport and sell brightly coloured, less labour-intensive items made especially for Tuvalu's small number of travellers; these are made with bright plastic yarn and shells. Departing loved ones or important guests are laden with farewell necklaces. See p737 for more on handicrafts.

The *fusus*, or island cooperative stores, sell a selection of basic groceries and, if a ship's been in recently, a few cold-stored vegetables.

OUTER ISLANDS

Tuvalu's remote outer islands and atolls are beautiful and pristine; they also have very little infrastructure for visitors, and are only accessible by the government supply ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* (see p749). The boats do a round trip lasting several days to each of the three island groups – Nanumea, Niutao, Nanumaga and Nui (Northern), Vaitupu, Nukufetau and Fongafale (Central), and Nukulaelae and Niulakita (Southern) – calling in at each island for the best part of a day to unload and load supplies and passengers. This means if you're prepared to spend a few nights on board ship for the duration of the trip, you can spend the days exploring the outer islands. If you choose to get off the boat and plan to stay, be warned; it might be some weeks before the next transport arrives! Give advance warning of your arrival and come prepared to be pretty much self-sufficient.

NUKUFETAU ATOLL

pop 590 / area 3 sq km

This atoll is the closest to Funafuti, about 100km to the northwest. Locally known as 'the island of the civil servants', because so many government workers come from here, it is also known for the (literally)

MAROONED IN TUVALU Tony Wheeler

It's comparatively easy to fly to Funafuti, the main island of the Tuvalu group, but very few visitors get any further. The passenger-cargo ship *Nivaga II* which runs around the islands is irregular and unreliable (quite apart from being bloody uncomfortable), and yachties, who might be tempted to drop by some of the islands, are put off by the poor anchorages. In two visits to Tuvalu I managed to visit eight of the nine islands, although along the way there was a spell as a castaway and the prime minister died.

Photographer Peter Bennetts was the catalyst for this misadventure. Concerned about the dangers of global warming and rising sea levels, he'd convinced the Tuvaluan government to support a project to produce a photographic book about the islands and the dangers they faced. He convinced me to come along to write the text. The government's role was transport: we would go along on the patrol boat *Te Mataili*, which would drop us off at various islands on the group. In Funafuti Peter and I met the prime minister, Ionatana Ionatana, and we signed the contract for Lonely Planet to produce the book which eventually emerged as *Time & Tide*. The next day we sailed south to Nukulaelae and that evening the prime minister had a heart attack and dropped dead. It set the tone for the whole project because back in Funafuti bad weather set in, the patrol ship couldn't leave base and after a few days of hanging around Peter and I retreated to Australia.

A couple of months later we returned to Funafuti for a second try, but this time the patrol boat wasn't available. We hitched a ride on the government fishing boat *Manau* which took us to Vaitupu along with a film crew from *National Geographic*. A couple of days later the *Manau* landed us at Nukufetau then continued to Funafuti to drop the film crew off, promising to return to pick us up 48 hours later. It didn't. The fishing boat, it transpired, had suffered some sort of major mechanical failure which, doubly unfortunately, coincided with a major electronic failure in the phone connection with Nukufetau. Day after day passed while we pondered what an extended stay in the small settlement would be like. 'Don't worry,' the islanders counselled, 'the *Nivaga II* usually drops by every three months. If it hasn't broken down and got stuck in Fiji for six months.'

Fortunately we didn't have to wait that long, a week later the patrol boat was patrolling again, picked us up and took us to all but one of the other islands. I'm not planning a return trip to tick Nui, the missing island, off my list.

fast-talking locals. It's possible that this, rather than Funafuti, was the atoll visited by RL Stevenson in 1890; Fanny Stevenson's diary of the trip on the *Janet Nichol* mentions navigation problems and also talks of meeting Restieaux, a European trader known to have lived on Nukufetau, not Funafuti, at the time.

During WWII large cargo ships and warships anchored in the lagoon, and two runways were built on Motulalo islet; if Tuvalu ever needs to increase its airport capacity, this will be the place to do it. The shattered remnants of a B24 Liberator bomber can be found among the palm trees, some distance north of the main runway. The island started the first primary school in Tuvalu, and the annual Founding Day on 11 February is celebrated with gusto.

The **council guesthouse** (☎ 36005) is right beside the primary school and has two bedrooms.

VAITUPU

pop 1590 / area 5.6 sq km

Vaitupu Island has the largest land area in Tuvalu; even so, in 1947, some families migrated from the overcrowded island to the island of Kioa in Fiji.

Motufoua, the first of Tuvalu's two secondary schools, is located here and there are over 600 boarders between the ages of 13 and 21. In March 2000 a terrible dormitory fire killed 18 teenage girls and their warden (the dormitory doors were locked and windows barred). *Vaitupu – An Account of Life on a Remote Polynesian Atoll* (1999), by John Chalkley, is an illustrated memoir of the author's time teaching on Vaitupu in the 1970s; you'll find it in the library on Fongafale.

You can walk almost all the way around the densely vegetated island, wading across the shallow entrances to the two lagoons at low tide. Just south of the harbour in the

village are the foundations of early trader Heinrich Nitz's house. His gravestone (the actual grave is further along the road) reveals that he was born in Stralsund, Germany, in 1839 and died on Vaitupu in 1906. Many islanders are descendants of Nitz. Continue around the southern end of the island, past the school; a small track directly opposite Te Motu Olepa islet leads a short way inland to a large horizontal slab just to the right (north) of the path. It was probably part of a pre-Christian site with good sunrise views but it's hard to find without local help. Continue along the coast past Elisefou agricultural station (presently sadly defunct) and the entrance to the larger lagoon to reach a shipwreck at the entrance to the smaller northern lagoon. The Solomon Islands ship *Sisco* ran onto the reef in 1981 and sat there relatively intact until the late '90s when it disintegrated.

The **council guesthouse** (☎ 30005) is behind the church and *maneapa*, close to the harbour. You can get meals here and the quantities are huge. The *fusi* is right by the harbour.

The Funafuti–Vaitupu boat trip takes eight or nine hours. Passengers are transferred to a small boat and shuttled into the harbour, which is too small for larger boats.

NUI ATOLL

pop 550 / area 2.8 sq km

Nui Atoll has 11 main islets along the eastern side of its lagoon. There are several coconut-fringed, white-sand **beaches**, and at low tide it is possible to walk between islets. Kiribati is also spoken here as some of the people are of Micronesian descent. Contact the **local island council** (☎ 23005) if you want to stay at the guesthouse.

NANUMAGA ATOLL

pop 590 / area 2.8 sq km

Nanumaga (nah-noo-mah-nga) is oval-shaped with two landlocked lagoons and a narrow fringing reef. The northern lagoon has a legendary giant's footprint while the southern one has some impressively fearless fish; catching them is not allowed. The two island sides, Tonga and Tokelau, reflect the islanders' origins and are further subdivided into five clans. Respect for the elders suffered in 1979 when they spent almost all of the atoll's funds purchasing

poor land in Texas! Contact the **island council** (☎ 33005) about their **guesthouse** (r \$40), which is pricey.

NIUTAO ATOLL

pop 660 / area 2.5 sq km

In 1949 Niutao acquired the island of Niu-lakita in the country's south, and families were settled there to relieve overpopulation on this small home atoll. The people, known for their traditional handicrafts, retain some traditional beliefs, and until 1982 they had among them a woman who had inherited the power to make rain. Niutao has a **council guesthouse** (☎ 28005).

NANUMEA ATOLL

pop 660 / area 3.9 sq km

Nanumea is Tuvalu's northernmost atoll and the closest to Kiribati. It is also one of the most beautiful, with a **fresh-water pond** (unusual for atolls) and a large **church** with a tall steeple and stained-glass windows. It suffered several Japanese attacks during WWII. Plane **wrecks** and a wrecked cargo ship near the main settlement serve as reminders. The old runway took up one-sixth of the land area, and its construction involved felling almost half of the existing coconut trees. The Americans also blasted a passage in the reef and the lagoon is now a sheltered **anchorage** for yachts. Contact the **island council** (☎ 26005) about the guesthouse.

NUKULAEAE ATOLL

pop 400 / area 1.8 sq km

This atoll has two main islets, Niuoku and Tumuiloto, on the eastern side of the lagoon, but the population is all on Fangaua on the western side. Nukulaeae is about 120km southeast of Funafuti and is Tuvalu's easternmost atoll. In 1863 two-thirds of its population was kidnapped by blackbirders and forced to work as slaves in Peruvian mines. Today, the people from Nukulaeae have a reputation for their dancing and singing, and have sent local dancers to the Marshall Islands to perform and to record a CD.

There is a pre-Christian **archaeological site** of small standing-stone 'platforms' about halfway along Niuoku. It's known as a *faleatau* (house of God), and bears similarities to others in eastern Polynesia. Near the southern end of Tumuiloto, a memorial and a small chapel marks the shipwreck arrival site

of Elekana, the Cook Islander credited with introducing Christianity to Tuvalu.

Visitors can stay at the island council **guesthouse** (☎ 35005). There are no channels into the lagoon and transfers ashore from larger ships can be tricky.

NIULAKITA

pop 35 / area 0.4 sq km

Tuvalu's ninth and most southern land-mass is the tiny coral island of Niulakita. It is at a little higher elevation than the other islands, with fertile soils and lush vegetation. It has white-sand **beaches** within a closed-ring reef, and a pretty church. Niu-lakita was not considered part of the eight islands of old Tuvalu, as it never had a permanent population. It had various foreign 'owners' and in the late 19th century was exploited for its guano; later, it was a copra plantation. In 1949 it was taken over by the people of Niutao, and now supports a shifting population of families from Niutao who stay for a year or two and are then replaced by others.

There is no guesthouse but you could try to arrange to stay with one of the local families; contact the **island council** (☎ 21022). A small channel has been blasted in the surrounding reef to allow access to the beach, but it's usually a hairy ride in through the waves.

TUVALU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Funafuti has one fairly ordinary hotel, one lodge, and some less expensive guesthouses. Most of the outer islands have basic council guesthouses. Tax is included in the room rates given in this chapter.

ACTIVITIES

Once in Tuvalu, you have no option but to get into the slow swing of things, since there isn't much to do, and no reason to hurry! You can walk, bike, snorkel (take your own gear) and swim, but there's no diving. (See also p741.)

BOOKS

The books mentioned below are in the library on Fongafale, but may be hard to find elsewhere.

PRACTICALITIES

- The Media Centre on Funafuti publishes *Tuvalu Echoes*, a monthly national newsletter in English and Tuvaluan.
- Radio Tuvalu on FM 94.8 has several daily programmes in Tuvaluan, with fill-in from the BBC World Service and Radio Australia. In 2005 there was no TV but there has been, and may be again!
- Appliances run on Australian-style plugs with three flat pins.
- Tuvalu uses the metric system (see the Quick Reference page for conversions).

The Material Culture of Tuvalu (1961), by Gerd Koch, concentrates on the islands of Niutao and Nanumaga. *Tuvalu, A History* (1983) was written by a team of Tuvaluans and provides an interesting local view of colonial and WWII history. *Strategic Atolls, Tuvalu and the Second World War* (1994), by Peter McQuarrie, is a good account, with photographs, of the islands in WWII.

Time & Tide: The Islands of Tuvalu (2001), by Peter Bennetts and Tony Wheeler, is a Lonely Planet photographic book about the islands.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open weekdays 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4pm. It's probably best not to make appointments between noon and 2pm. Government offices, NGOs and banks close on public holidays (see p829 for a list of public holidays in the Pacific), but not all places do. You'll usually find at least one place to eat, and even *fusi* open on Sunday after church.

CHILDREN

Children are welcome in Tuvalu as they are in all Pacific countries. Child-specific activities and entertainment are scarce, so be prepared to make your own or to join in locally with, for example, dance or singing practice.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Tuvaluan Embassies & Consulates

Tuvalu's diplomatic representation abroad consists of one embassy: **Fiji** (☎ 679-330 1355; fax 679-330 1023; 16 Gorrie St, PO Box 14449, Suva).

Embassies & Consulates in Tuvalu

The only overseas embassy in Tuvalu is that of the **People's Republic of China** (Taiwan; ☎ 20278). Other major nations that have a South Pacific interest handle Tuvalu from their embassy in Suva in Fiji (see p211 for further information).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In addition to New Year's, Easter, Christmas and Boxing Day (see p829), Tuvalu celebrates:

Funafuti Youth Day 11 February

Commonwealth Day March

Bomb Day (Japanese bombing Funafuti) 23 April

Gospel Day Second Monday in May

Queen's Birthday Early June

Children's Day Early August

Independence Day Early October

Hurricane Day (1972 Cyclone Bebe) 21 October

Prince Charles' Birthday Early November

These days generally involve some sort of ceremonial and church service, followed by evening sports and dancing.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are three Internet cafés in Funafuti. When the national server is working the service is good, but the system can be down for weeks if there's a problem. If you're emailing someone in Tuvalu and getting no response, just keep trying.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Jane's Oceania Pages (www.janeresture.com) A wide-ranging and interesting website about Oceania, with links to specific countries. It's maintained by Jane Resture, descendant of one of the earliest traders and settlers in Tuvalu.

Timeless Tuvalu (www.timelesstuvalu.com) This government-run site has information and links for visitors.

Tuvalu Online (www.tuvaluislands.com) An excellent site with interesting links. It is produced by a Canadian/Tuvaluan family, and has photos, news headlines and general information about the country.

Tuvalu Overview (www.tuvalu.site.ne.jp) The website of a Japanese NGO that runs small-group ecotours to Tuvalu. The auto-translate is somewhat wacky – 'Tuvalu' translates as 'brim Lu', for example – but Japanese speakers will find it useful.

MONEY

Australian currency is the legal tender, but there are also Tuvaluan 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c and \$1 coins. You're strongly advised to take

HOW MUCH?

- **Apple:** A\$1.50
- **Postcard:** A\$1
- **Basic mask and snorkel:** A\$25
- **500g pack spaghetti:** A\$3
- **Plain shell necklace:** A\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1.5L drinking water:** A\$2
- **1L petrol:** A\$1.35
- **Can VB beer:** A\$1.75
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** A\$17
- **Take-away roti:** A\$1

enough A\$ cash with you to cover your trip. See the Quick Reference page for exchange rates.

The National Bank of Tuvalu on Funafuti is the country's only bank (see p739). Several major currencies, plus Fijian dollars, are accepted for exchange; the rate for cash is better than travellers cheques, but neither rate is great. There's a commission payable on travellers cheques.

Be warned: on our most recent visit there were no credit-card facilities available in Tuvalu and no ATMs. This may change with the possible (but as yet unconfirmed) introduction of ANZ banking services to the country (ring ☎ 20803 or email nbt@tuvalu.tv to check current information).

There is a **Western Union** (☎ 20622; www.westernunion.com) branch in Funafuti that accepts money transfers, but if the lines are down this may not happen as quickly as advertised.

A 10% government tax on accommodation is included in prices listed in this chapter. Tipping isn't expected.

TELEPHONE

Tuvalu's international telephone code is ☎ 688.

The anonymous sprawling yellow building near the airport is the Tuvalu Telecom building. You can make calls, buy phone-cards and get a local SIM card for your mobile phone here. The mobile phone system was introduced in 2005 and outgoing mobile phone calls are only slightly more expensive than landline.

A word of warning about the phone numbers in this book: on our most recent visit, local phone numbers were undergoing changes which were not complete and had yet to be reflected in any sort of printed directory; so expect some changes to the numbers listed here. If you're having no luck, try calling Tuvalu **directory enquiries** (☎ 20006) for an up-to-date listing.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Try the **government tourism officer** (☎ 20408; fax 20210; www.timelesstuvalu.com; Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning & Industries, top fl, Government Offices).

TIME

Tuvalu is 12 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). When it's noon in Tuvalu, it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am the same day in Sydney, Australia, and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

VISAS

Visitors do not require a visa and are granted a one-month entry permit on arrival. You need a valid passport and a return ticket – and a valid yellow-fever certificate if you have come from an infected area. Visa extensions, available at **immigration** (☎ 20815; Government Offices), are granted for a maximum of three months.

TRANSPORT IN TUVALU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Tuvalu's small international airport is on Funafuti.

Air Fiji (☎ 679-331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) flies from Suva to Funafuti (from F\$1300 return) on Monday, Thursday and Sunday in a 25-seater Brasilia aircraft. Make sure you reconfirm, as seats are in high demand.

Recently there was talk again about **Air Pacific** (www.airpacific.com) also starting to operate this route and extending the service north to Kiribati; check the website for up-to-date information. For more details about airlines see p841.

Sea

The MVs *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau*, both government-owned cargo/passenger ships, travel to Suva, Fiji, every three months or

DEPARTURE TAX

An international departure tax of A\$20 applies to all visitors over 12 years old.

so (the trip takes about four days). One-way fares are A\$73/316 for deck/double cabin, with meals. **Pacific Agencies** (☎ 679-331 5444; info@pacship.com.fj) is the agent for the MV *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* in Suva. The **Marine Services Office** (☎ 20055; Government Offices) handles schedules and bookings in Funafuti.

The cargo boat *Nei Matagare* makes trips roughly once a month between Tuvalu and Fiji. **Williams & Goslings** (☎ 679-331 2633; www.wgffiji.com.fj) are its Suva agents.

GETTING AROUND

There is no domestic airline in Tuvalu.

Boat

All inter-island transport is by boat. Only Funafuti and Nukufetau have reef passages large enough for ships to enter their lagoons and only Funafuti has a real dock. This means ships must load and unload into a small boat, which can be hazardous in rough seas – not for those who aren't confident swimmers.

The MVs *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* typically visit each of the outer islands once every three or four weeks. The southern trip takes three or four days, and the northern trip about a week. Don't expect too much comfort: it's usually crowded with chickens and pigs as well as people, while toilets overflow and passengers are often seasick. Take LOTS of drinking water with you, as well as your own food; shipboard meals tend to be corned beef and rice, or rice and corned beef. A return trip to the northern/southern islands costs A\$250/190 for 1st class without food, and A\$107/87 for deck class without food.

For bookings and schedule confirmation, contact the **Marine Services Office** (☎ 20055; Government Offices) in Funafuti. Schedules are unreliable as the boats may be off for maintenance, or detouring to pick up VIPs.

Visiting yachts have to check in at Funafuti for immigration and customs clearance on arrival, and before leaving Tuvalu.

There are no mooring fees and no other formalities, but you must moor outside the conservation area.

Car & Motorcycle

There is no organised car hire. Motorcycles and mopeds are the most popular means of land transport, and are available

for rent on Funafuti for a daily rate of A\$10; you may be asked to produce your home licence. Driving is on the left side of the road.

Local Transport

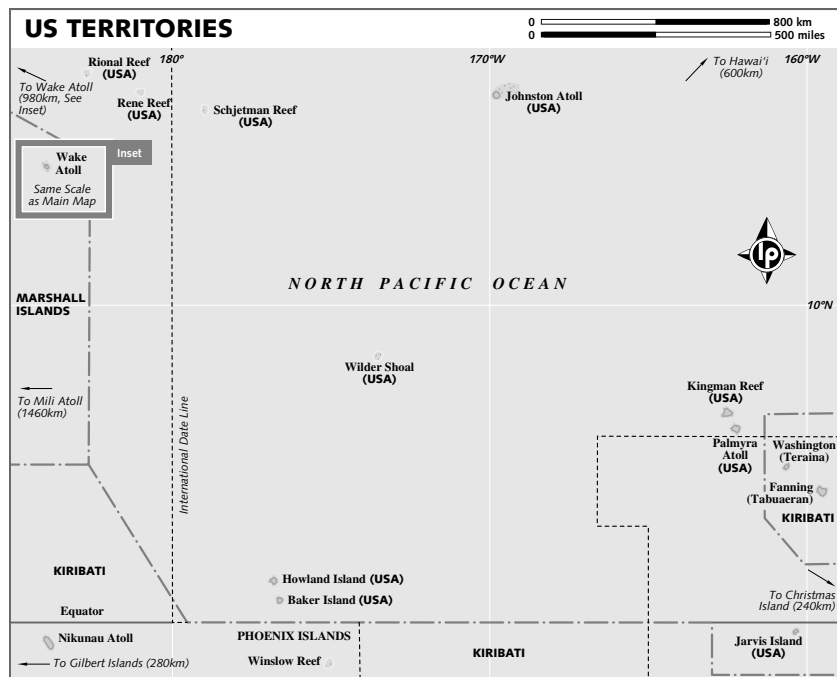
The capital, Fongafale, has a minibus and taxi service.

US Territories

Since the 19th century, the US has claimed several small islands, a few atolls and some narrow coral reefs between Kiribati and Hawai'i in the North Pacific. The Americans staked their claims due to bird poo, or more politely guano, during the heyday of the phosphate hunt and legalised their takings with the Guano Islands Act of 1856.

Over the years, sovereignty issues have come and gone in these unincorporated US territories. Wake Island is claimed by the Marshall Islands, and Kiribati has asked the US for Howland, Baker and Jarvis Islands in order to extend its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and expand its fishing licence revenue.

Some of the islands have had chequered pasts but, with the exception of Wake, they are now all national wildlife refuges administered by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS; www.fws.gov). The only people lucky enough to get to visit the islands are scientists and conservationists with special permits.



HOWLAND ISLAND

pop 0 / area 6 sq km

Not every speck in the ocean finds fame, but tiny Howland was catapulted into the lime-light in 1937 when it was the intended refuelling stop for US aviator Amelia Earhart on her round-the-equator trip. An airstrip was built in anticipation of her landing, but Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, never made it. They were three-quarters of

GUANO ISLANDS ACT OF 1856

'...Whenever any citizen of the United States discovers a deposit of guano on any island, rock or key, not within the lawful jurisdiction of any other government and not occupied by the citizens of any other government, and takes peaceable possession thereof, and occupies the same, such island, rock or key may, at the discretion of the President, be considered as appertaining to the United States...'

the way around the globe when they left Lae in New Guinea bound for Howland, 4133km away, and were never seen again. It appears that they failed to locate Howland and came down elsewhere in the Pacific instead. Earhart's fate remains unknown, but theories abound – the most dramatic being that she was captured by the Japanese during WWII and taken to Mili Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The most recent hypothesis is that her bones were found on Nikumaroro, in Kiribati's Gilbert Islands chain – see the boxed text (opposite).

Earhart's airstrip is still on Howland, albeit in bits and pieces, but there is little else on the treeless, barren island except scrub vegetation.

BAKER ISLAND

pop 0 / area 1.4 sq km

Like its near neighbour Howland, uninhabited and barren Baker Island belongs to the Phoenix Island group. It has a fringing coral reef and is a breeding ground for pelagic

birds and marine turtles, as well as a stop for migrating shorebirds. At its highest point, Baker reaches 8m.

In the mid-19th century, whalers frequented Baker and Howland in search of provisions. The US took possession in 1857 and US and British companies mined phosphate until late in the 19th century. In 1935 the US government planted a few colonists on both islands to strengthen its territorial claims, but they were all evacuated in 1942 when the Japanese attacked. The next year, 2000 US troops arrived and built an airstrip – it is still there but is definitely unusable. Baker became a national wildlife refuge in 1974 and the FWS visits annually.

JARVIS ISLAND

pop 0 / area 4.5 sq km

Jarvis' nearest neighbour is Kiribati's Christmas Island (Kiritimati). Like Christmas, Jarvis is part of the Line Islands group and its dry climate stifles all but grasses and small shrubs. Migratory birds, however, abound. Like Palmyra Atoll, the island is also an important green turtle nesting spot.

The British discovered Jarvis in 1821 but the US annexed the uninhabited island in 1858 and immediately started carting off phosphate – over the next 21 years 300,000 tons of guano was mined. The Brits again put their hand up for the island in 1889 but did nothing more, so in 1936 the US government sent colonists to live there and firm up their territorial claim. These folk were evacuated in 1942 and, since then, the islands have remained uninhabited (except for a party of scientists who stayed briefly in 1957 for the International Geophysical Year).

PALMYRA ATOLL

pop 0 / area 12 sq km

Palm-lined Palmyra, 560km north of Jarvis Island, comprises 52 emerald islets set amid pristine coral reefs surrounding three turquoise lagoons. According to the family who owned the atoll for most of the 20th century, Palmyra is 'a place time forgot'.

Americans aboard the ship *Palmyra* first discovered the atoll in 1802, but it was not until 1862 that Hawai'i claimed it. The US

WAS EARHART FOUND?

The mystery of Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan's disappearance en route to Howland Island may have been solved. British soldiers discovered two sets of bones and shoes on remote Nikumaroro (Kiribati) in 1941. The remains were pronounced by a British doctor to be the bones of two European men. In late 1998, however, the doctor's notes were re-examined, leading modern specialists to conclude that the doctor was wrong – that one set of bones belonged to a Caucasian female, 170cm tall – just like Amelia Earhart. But as the bones have long since vanished, the mystery remains.

also (separately) claimed the atoll around that time under the Guano Islands Act. However, when the US annexed Hawai'i in 1898 the annexation act specifically excluded Palmyra from the state of Hawai'i because it turned out to have no guano and had thus been unlawfully claimed.

In 1922 Hawai'i's Fullard-Leo family bought Palmyra for US\$15,000. They sold it in 2000 for a cool US\$37 million to the Nature Conservancy, a major US conservation group, which immediately turned Palmyra over to the FWS as a wildlife refuge. The family turned down the first bidder, a New York corporation, following the outcry from across the Pacific when it was discovered the corporation planned to use Palmyra as a nuclear waste dump.

Palmyra's boat pier and wide harbour make it an attractive stop for visiting yachts. However, it is not open to the public and yachties seeking to stay here must ask permission first from the FWS.

KINGMAN REEF

pop 0 / area 1 sq km

Treeless, triangular Kingman, with a maximum elevation of just a metre, is little more than a coral head surrounded by a massive reef. Kingman was discovered in 1798 by a US whaler, but is named after Captain WE Kingman of the US vessel *Shooting Star*, who came by in 1853. It was claimed by the US under the Guano Islands Act, though subsequently it was found to have no phosphate.

Like nearby Palmyra, Kingman Reef was owned by the Fullard-Leo family but in 1934 it was commandeered by the US Navy. The deep lagoon was used as a halfway station for Pan American Airways' flying boats between Hawai'i and American Samoa in the late 1930s. Kingman remained under navy jurisdiction until 2001, when it became a wildlife refuge.

JOHNSTON ATOLL

pop 200 / area 2.8 sq km

Johnston Atoll, 1100km northwest of Palmyra, consists of two natural coral islets (Sand and Johnston) and two artificial ones, North and East (Akau and Hikina). Viewed from the air, Johnston Island has a most unusual shape, its shoreline extending out in hard straight lines. This is because soil was scooped up from the lagoon during WWII and used to lengthen the runway.

Johnston's other geographic distinction is its isolation. Roughly a third of the way between Hawai'i and the Marshall Islands (or 717 nautical miles southwest of Hawai'i, to be exact), it made a useful refuelling stop for commercial airlines bound for Micronesia and, until very recently, was an absolutely fabulous spot for disposing of all those weapons the world no longer needs.

In 1796 Captain Johnston of HMS *Cornwallis* came ashore. The atoll was claimed by both the US and Hawai'i in 1858 – Hawai'ian

navigator Samuel Allen of the *Kalama* arrived three months after the US, ripped down the US flag and put up the Hawai'ian instead. When Hawai'i became a US state in 1898, the US separately annexed Johnston Island and the atoll's limited phosphate deposits were mined until the early 20th century. In 1926 Johnston became a national bird refuge; however, its peace was interrupted in 1934 when it came under navy control and was used as a submarine refuelling base and air base. The air force took over the islands in 1948, and the North and East islets were created over the next 15 years. At the same time, high-altitude nuclear tests were carried out.

For 10 years from 1990, Johnston Island served as a storage and disposal site for weapons – one of nine US sites devoted to this purpose. More than 1200 US military and contract workers were stationed on this tiny atoll and kept themselves busy by destroying 6% of the world's weapons arsenal, including mines, missiles, mortars, rockets, bombs and VX nerve gas. Cleanup and closure of the facility was completed in 2004 but some 200 personnel still call it home, as does a great variety of fauna.

WAKE ATOLL

pop 200 / area 6.5 sq km

Wake Atoll, 2000km west of Johnston, consists of three small islands: Peale, Wake and Wilkes. Wake is named after a British captain who landed there in 1796. The US officially claimed it about a century later when a US ship heading to the Philippines during the Spanish-American war planted the US flag in 1898.

Originally intended as a cable station, Wake served as a refuelling base for trans-Pacific flights during the 1930s; a 48-room hotel supported the base. After WWII, the US Navy administered Wake until 1962. Now, the US Army Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC) controls Wake and keeps 200 contract workers here to maintain the missile system.

The Marshall Islands has laid claim to the atoll on the grounds that it's part of the Ratak chain. On the US side there has been talk for years about making Wake a wildlife refuge, but for now it is still off limits.

SOME WILDLIFE REFUGE!

Until early this century, Johnston Island was the Jekyll and Hyde of the Pacific. While infamous as a chemical weapons cleanup site, it was simultaneously a national wildlife refuge. Thousands of birds, including boobies, shearwaters and terns, use it as a migratory or nesting stop. All told, Johnston has over 300 species of fish, 20 species of native and migratory birds and 32 species of coral, as well as green sea turtles, dolphins and humpback whales. When the US military finished operations here in 2001, Johnston was turned over to the US Fish & Wildlife Services (FWS) to run as a national wildlife refuge. At long last, it may slowly return to nature.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Vanuatu

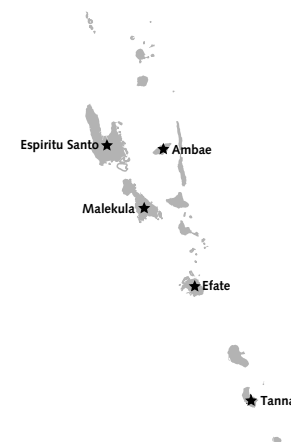
You're heading to Vanuatu? Fantastic. You're going to love it. But it's not just a decadent escape with balmy breezes and gourmet food. It's also home to several best-in-the-world experiences that very few people know about: a luxury liner, like the *Titanic*, shipwrecked in clear diveable water; the world's most accessible active volcano; a giant banyan tree the size of a soccer field; pounding, cascading waterfalls; extraordinary cultural ceremonies and dances; primitive villages where you can witness an ancient living culture; and picture-perfect beaches where there's nobody but you and your snorkel gear – it's also a snorkellers' and divers' Mecca.

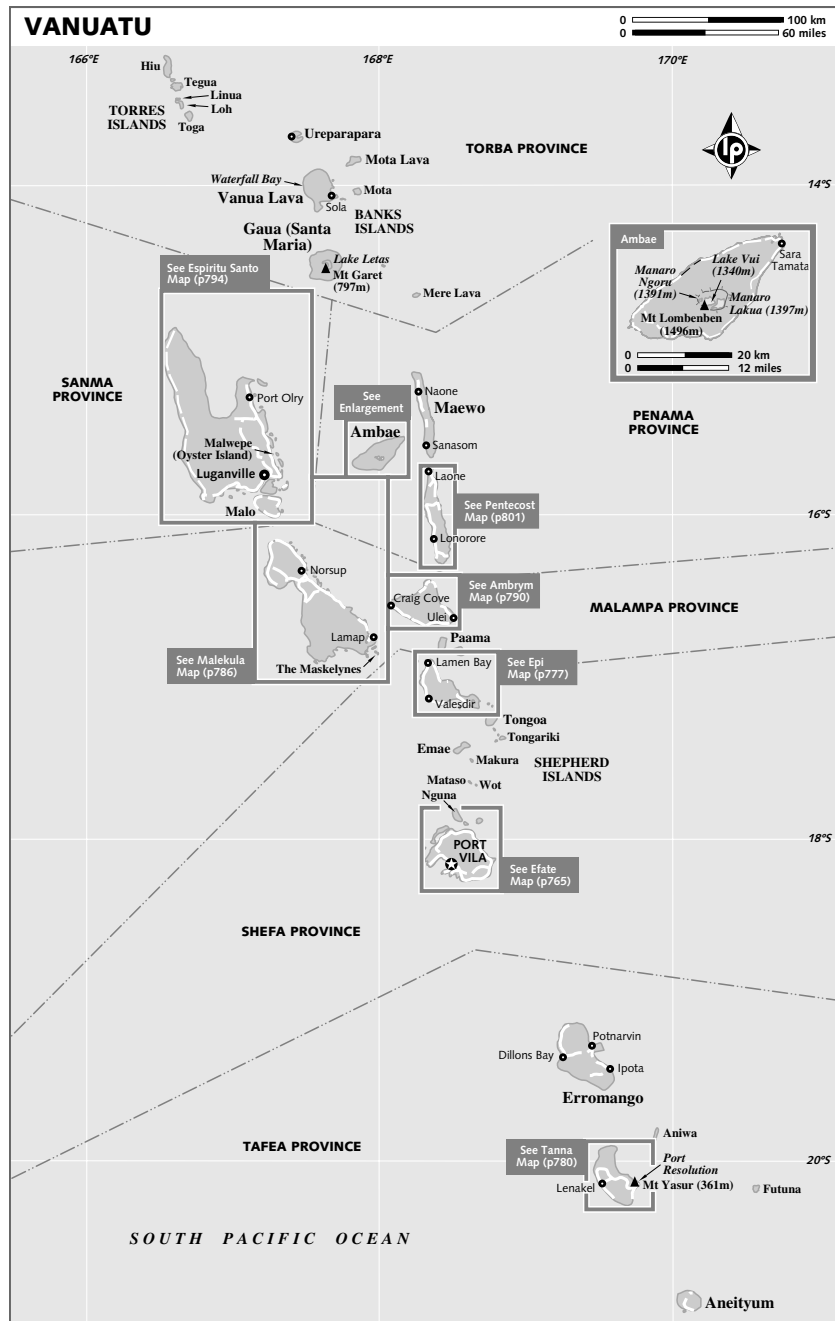
Port Vila, the national capital, buzzes at the centre of Vanuatu's tourist trade, all colonial and cool, with a view for every restaurant, and hotel beds that float you out over lagoons. If you've come on a package deal, you're just starting your adventure. Stay on when it ends to discover a few of the unique things that are Vanuatu, and to try out the sporty options, like abseiling down a waterfall, parasailing over the glorious harbour, zapping out of a cave of stalactites through a ravine on a blow-up float-ring, turning nature-child for the night on a tiny offshore island.

The best thing about Vanuatu, though, is that you feel safe and happy here. The people are a delight. They love their country and want you to enjoy its pleasures, but they aren't after the 'tourist dollar'. There's no bargaining, no hawkers, no pressure to buy. It is so refreshing.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Slither and slosh through cloud-forest at **Ambae** (p803) to enter a mystical world of colourful crater lakes and spouting steam
- Flipper-kick into the wreck of a luxury liner and hack your way through to a cave at **Espiritu Santo** (p793)
- Connect awesome savagery with sublime mysticism at ancient cannibal sites and spirit caves in **Malekula** (p785)
- Wine and dine in romantic settings, then whiz, rip or whirl through tours and activities in **Efate** (p764)
- Go organic, go natural – go for golden sunsets, orange fireworks displays and seriously powerful kava in **Tanna** (p779)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Vanuatu's climate varies from wet tropical in the north (over 4000mm of rainfall a year) to subtropical in the south (less than 2000mm), with dry rain-shadow areas in between. The dry season – from May to October – is cruising time: sparkling days and pleasantly cool evenings. This is Vanuatu at its glorious best – festivals and sporting contests are held, beaches call. For walking, the cooler period from June to August is better. Speaking of cool, it's advisable to take some warm clothing year-round.

November to April is the wet season, with higher temperatures, heavier rains, and mosquitoes. December to March is cyclone time. Vanuatu averages 2.5 cyclones a year.

Temperatures in Luganville and Port Vila range from 27°C in July to 30°C in January. Lenakel (on Tanna) is a degree or two cooler. Winter nights in Vila can drop to below 12°C.

HISTORY

In July 2004, an archaeological dig at Teouma, near Port Vila, unearthed Lapita pottery (see p39), and the skeletal remains of nine Lapita people, chickens and pigs, dating back to 3200 years ago. The first people to settle, establish crops and have domestic animals, they had crossed the sea from the Solomon Islands.

Between the 11th and 15th centuries AD, Polynesians arrived from the central Pacific in sailing canoes holding up to 50 people, live animals, and gardens growing in the boats. Vanuatu's traditions tell of cultural heroes arriving around this time from islands to the east, bringing with them new skills and customs.

Ancient Vanuatu

The people lived in small, clan-based villages, each with its own language, that were separated by impassable mountains, jungle and rocky coastlines. Everyone lived in the shadow of their ancestors' spirits. Some spirits were benevolent, but others were hostile – famines, cyclones, enemy attack and other misfortunes could result if they became displeased. Magic was the main defence against angry spirits.

Inter-island trade networks were well established, with large sailing canoes venturing

VANUATU FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Port Vila (Efate)
- **Population:** 206,000
- **Land area:** 12,200 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 678
- **Currency:** Vatu (Vt)
- **Languages:** Bislama, English, French and over 100 local languages
- **Greeting:** Alo (Bislama)
- **Website:** www.vanuatutourism.com

as far afield as New Caledonia. Otherwise, villagers regarded their neighbours with deep suspicion.

Skirmishes between villages were frequent and usually the victor captured one or two males for the men of high rank to eat. It gave a chief great status to present a victim, ready for the pot, to chiefs of other villages. The victims' relatives would mount reprisals, so hostilities continued indefinitely.

Alongside this, the culture is steeped in agriculture. Yam cultivation decides the cycle of the year, and months are named after yams.

European Explorers

The first Europeans to visit Vanuatu, in May 1606, were members of the Spanish expedition led by Pedro Fernández de Quirós, who was convinced that in Santo he had found the fabled *terra australis incognita*. It was not until May 1768 that Louis-Antoine de Bougainville sailed between Malekula and Santo, thereby proving that Vanuatu's largest island was not *terra australis* after all.

James Cook arrived in Vanuatu on 16 July 1774, on his second Pacific expedition. He drew the first charts of the region and named the places he visited. Many of these names are still in use today, including Tanna, Erromango, Ambrym and the Shepherd Islands.

In 1789, shortly after the famous mutiny on the *Bounty*, William Bligh sailed through the northern Banks group in his longboat. He sighted several previously unrecorded islands, and returned three years later to confirm his discoveries.

Missionaries & Traders

The first Christian missionary on the scene was the Reverend John Williams from the London Missionary Society (LMS). In 1839 he stepped ashore on Erromango, and was promptly eaten. After this inauspicious beginning the church decided to send Polynesian teachers from Samoa, hoping they would be more acceptable than Europeans. However, a number of them were also killed, or died of malaria.

In 1848 the Reverend John Geddie arrived on Aneityum and made it the headquarters for the Presbyterian mission in Vanuatu. Presbyterianism eventually became the major Christian denomination, particularly on the islands south of Efate. The Anglican Diocese of Melanesia followed in 1860 and became influential in the northern islands, while Catholicism arrived in 1887.

Meanwhile, traders heard about the sandalwood trees on Erromango. There was great demand for the wood in China, where it was used for incense, so there were enormous profits to be made. Islanders traded tree trunks for guns, tobacco, or men from enemy villages to be eaten at ceremonies. Sometimes they would persuade the traders to use their ships' guns to lay waste to their enemies' villages. The best study of the turbulent times of the 19th-century sandalwood trade is Dorothy Shinberg's *They Came for Sandalwood*.

Blackbirding developed as the sandalwood was depleted. Cheap labour was needed for the sugar-cane industries, coconut plantations and nickel mines of nearby countries. Blackbirders kidnapped shiploads of ni-Vanuatu (Vanuatu people), many of whom died at sea in the overcrowded boats, or were killed for trying to escape. The missionaries stepped in, campaigning relentlessly until the practice was banned.

European Settlement

The first European settler was a cattle rancher who arrived in 1854. Others followed, lured by the chance to produce cotton during the US Civil War. Intense rivalry existed between the French and English. There was no law and order, so brawls were commonplace, as were clashes between settlers and ni-Vanuatu, who resented the loss of their land.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, the local inhabitants were decimated by European diseases.

Some say Vanuatu's population was about one million in the early 19th century, but in 1935 only 41,000 ni-Vanuatu remained.

Condominium

In 1906, seeing the Germans becoming influential in the region, the English and French governments, in an awkward moment of togetherness, established the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. Vanuatu would be ruled equally by the two colonial powers.

Cynics called the Condominium 'the Pandemonium', as the dual administration produced a bizarre duplication of authorities. There were two education systems, two police forces and two currencies. Road rules were an issue, as the English drove on the left, the French on the right. Anglo-French rivalry reached new extremes of farce, as the height of each flag up each ministerial flagpole was measured every morning. At least the food was edible in the French jail.

To Kill a Bird with Two Stones by Jeremy MacClancy is available at the National Museum in Vila. It's an excellent history from Vanuatu's earliest beginnings through the Condominium period (the 'two stones' of the title).

WWII

Japan's advance through the Pacific had reached the Solomon Islands by early 1942, when US forces arrived in Vanuatu and constructed bases, first at Havannah Harbour and Port Vila on Efate, then in southeastern Santo.

With Japan's defeat in 1945, the US Forces withdrew, leaving behind huge quantities of surplus equipment. Some of this was sold and the remainder was dumped into the sea near Luganville on Santo, at Million Dollar Point.

Cargo cults appeared on several islands as ni-Vans sought to secure the kind of wealth they'd seen in the camps – they believed that if they acted like Europeans, then 'cargo' would come their way. Most of these cults waned when the riches failed to materialise.

Independence

Land ownership had become Vanuatu's major political issue by the mid-1960s. It was the spark that spurred the country to seek independence.

At this time white settlers 'owned' about 30% of the country's land area. A *kastom*-oriented movement called the Nagriamel sprang up under the leadership of the charismatic Jimmy Stevens. Operating from Santo, its aims were to protect ni-Vanuatu claims to their traditional land. By the late 1960s, Nagriamel had expanded to other islands in northern Vanuatu.

Another great leader, Father Walter Lini, formed the New Hebrides National Party in 1971. It was later called the Vanua'aku Party. His book *Beyond Pandemonium: From New Hebrides to Vanuatu* tells of the lead-up to his country's independence.

The Condominium authorities agreed to hold the country's first general election in November 1979. The Vanua'aku Party were clear winners. Independence was fixed for mid-1980.

Serious threats of secession were being made on Santo and Tanna in early 1980; late in May matters came to a head. An insurrection on Tanna split the island between government supporters and rebels. On Santo, secessionists seized Luganville and hoisted the flag of the Independent Republic of Vemarana.

Several other northern islands proclaimed their own secessions during June. They merged and announced a Provisional Government of the Northern Islands, under Jimmy Stevens.

Order was not restored until the new government brought in soldiers from Papua New Guinea following independence on 30 July, after which the secessionist ringleaders were arrested and the rebellion collapsed.

New Nation

Since independence, the ni-Vanuatu government has established diplomatic relations with over 70 countries, signed the General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade (GATT), and declared the country a nuclear-free zone. Its desire has been for development that benefits everyone equally, while preserving customs and traditions.

Government affairs have stabilised lately, after a few years with too many political parties, much infighting and some high-profile scandals. President Kalkot Matas Kelekele and Prime Minister Lini have led a quiet revolution in the higher ranks. Kelekele's book *New Hebrides: the Road to*

Independence includes contributions from young ni-Van writers and provides a broad look at the issues the country faces.

In 2005 Vanuatu qualified for the **US Millennium Challenge** (www.mca.gov) – the only South Pacific country to do so. For this, they will receive a US\$40 million grant for infrastructure, which will probably go towards repairing roads (so those excruciating Disney rides called roads may become a whole lot smoother).

Of major significance was the police mutiny trial in 2002, where eight high-ranking police and Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) officers stood trial for the unlawful arrests of 15 public officials, among them the attorney-general and police commissioner. The trial was postponed several times, and had still not been heard in early 2006.

THE CULTURE

There is huge variety in Vanuatu's culture and customs. Dances, funerals, weddings, initiations, systems of authority, artistic styles, and animal and crop husbandry all differ from island to island. Yet there are common themes, particularly the obligation to pay for all services rendered, and the finality of any area labelled *tabu*, which means 'sacred' as well as 'forbidden'. If a part of a traditional ceremony, a section of beach, a cave – anywhere at all – is *tabu*, it must be respected.

The lavishly illustrated *Arts of Vanuatu*, edited by Joel Bonnemaïson et al, is a fabulous introduction to the diversity of Vanuatu's culture, connecting historic and contemporary influences.

The National Psyche

Ownership of ancestral land, sea and reefs, and everything that comes from them, is fundamental to ni-Vanuatu life. It is held by ni-Vans for the future, and the rhythm of the seasons dictates how those resources are used. They viewed with horror the European way of using the land; disputes over use and ownership are still serious issues. It's wise to carry at least 500Vt with you, to any activity, as you never know when a villager will ask you to pay the fee for swimming, fishing, or looking at or walking on a property. This is despite the fact that ni-Vans are very hospitable and generous. It is a matter of respect for the value of the resource.

LAWYER OF THE DANCE *Ian Byles*

I had certainly expected to find dancing on Vanua Lava, one of the Banks Islands. Among the most northerly islands in Vanuatu, the Banks Islands are known for their customary Melanesian dancing. Swish resorts in Port Vila hire troupes of Banks Islanders to perform every Thursday night outside bars, with five minutes afterwards for 'me with the dancers, Vanuatu' photographs and video footage. But not ballroom dancing.

One Sunday I attended a farewell ceremony for a foreign anthropologist, who'd spent the last year in the village. A cow had been slaughtered for the communal lunch. The day before I'd seen its head, suspended from a pole, being carried away, an improbably long tongue swinging pendulously from its mouth. The flesh had been boiled in several large vats and baked in earth ovens overnight.

That afternoon, each family laid a bowl of some description on the ground around the cooking vats, creating a motley carpet of battered plastic, aluminium and glass bowls into which villagers, with an acute eye for equality, ladled the cooked meat. Within half an hour it was gone and the dancing began.

Most dancing in the Banks is neither extravagant nor passionately dramatic; its patterns are simple and iterative, lulling the participants into abandonment with subtly developing percussive rhythms and the shared swaying of bodies. There were dances for men and dances for women, followed by 'public' dances where all joined in the heady, giddy tumult that continued until dusk.

Then the tone changed. After dark a group of youths set up a 'string band' – tea-chest bass and homemade ukuleles and guitars that ply a very limited range of chords in strict four-four time.

I expect that when the anthropologist asked, out of the blue, whether I had ever learned ballroom dancing, she wanted to relieve the monotony rather than conduct an impromptu survey of cultural affiliations. Doubtless, she didn't expect me to reply that I had. Possibly she regretted asking, for having established that we could get up and take to the floor, there was now the uncomfortable feeling that we probably *should*.

One song ended. We stood and moved into the lamplight. All talking ceased, replaced by excited whispers and much gesturing in our direction. The locals remained silent for barely a moment after we started a foxtrot, sweeping (we hoped majestically) across the packed earth, then as one they erupted into laughter. They laughed and laughed. Their laughter brought others from the village until there were hundreds of people around the dancing ground, falling over, holding themselves, collapsing against each other. It was the most rewarding sound I have heard. No ridicule or malice, just untrammelled delight that two white people would be prepared to do their own bizarre custom dance on the mud, under a mango tree, by the light of a kerosene lamp.

Volunteering in Vanuatu has brought many challenges. Accomplishing spin turns on slippery mud on Vanua Lava was one of the easier ones. While we were struggling to execute a poised quickstep – and many more times since – a quote from Nietzsche came to mind: 'We should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.'

Ian Byles worked as a case investigator with the Office of the Ombudsman in Vanuatu through Australian Volunteers International (see the boxed text, p771).

Everyone has a role to play in society. Each village is run by a chief who acts as a justice of the peace and as a delegate for the village. His word is law. Even politicians must do what the chief says when visiting their home villages.

When Mother Nature provides for all of your needs, society has to develop new challenges. In many areas, chiefs achieve their rank through *nimangki* (grade-taking) ceremonies, which include

a lavish feast. Villagers who eat at the feast are then indebted to the chief, becoming a party of supporters who look to him for leadership and guidance. Each step up the village social ladder is accompanied by the ritual killing of pigs, so only men who have acquired enough pigs can hope to reach society's highest levels.

A young man needs a wife to care for his pigs, but he cannot look for a wife until he has built himself a house.

Lifestyle

Life in a Vanuatu village is much as it has always been. The centre of village life is the *nakamal*, a men's clubhouse and clan museum, where men meet to discuss village and national issues.

A traditional *nakamal* was always strictly *tabu* to women, and tourists may still be barred from entering in *kastom*-oriented areas. However, these days they are often open to anyone. Women have their own meeting house, where they produce goods for sale, like woven sections of roof.

Women spend many hours in the family garden and watching over the husband's pigs, while men tend their cash crops, fish, hunt, build boats, carve artefacts and discuss council matters. While the women prepare the evening meal, the men talk in the *nakamal* and drink kava.

There are strict rules in every village regarding dress. Islanders do not wear scant or revealing clothing, and women's thighs are always covered.

Overall, the most pressing problem for all ni-Van families is finding the money to pay their children's school fees each quarter.

Population

Vanuatu's population is almost entirely ni-Vanuatu. (Melanesian, although some islands have a strong Polynesian heritage.) There are a few Europeans, Asians and other Pacific Islanders.

Mostly everyone lives in rural areas, in villages of less than 50 people, along narrow coastal strips or on tiny offshore islets. There is a drift into towns, particularly Vila, by ni-Vanuatu in search of work. One village had no fish to eat after the fishermen formed a string band and left for Vila to play at hotels.

ARTS

Given that the population is spread over 83 islands, it's not surprising that Vanuatu's art and traditions vary from island to island; this diversity contributes to the country's unique cultural identity.

The most common subject matters in ni-Vanuatu arts are the human form and traditional interpretations of what ancestral figures looked like. The most important artefacts are made for *nimangki* ceremonies (see opposite).

Vila's National Museum of Vanuatu (p767) is an excellent place to learn more about art and culture in Vanuatu.

Carvings

While wood is the main carved material, objects are also made from tree fern, stone and coral. Serious carving is almost entirely created for ceremonies, while items for sale to tourists are usually small copies of the real thing.

The best carvings come from northern Ambrym. Items to look out for:

- carved bows and arrows, and traditional ceremonial spears
- war clubs made to designs attributed to ancestral cultural heroes
- pig-killing clubs shaped like mattocks, with two stylised faces carved on either side
- large platters and bowls in which yams and kava are pounded, or in which *laplap* (Vanuatu's national dish) is served
- model canoes, some with figureheads, others with sails made from dried pandanus leaves
- statues made from tree ferns, representing ancestral figures

Cinema

Wan Smol Bag Theatre in Vila has produced several excellent videos that are for sale around Vila. It uses a light-handed approach to sensitive issues, as in *Pacific Star*, a musical comedy about a remote Pacific island and the chaos caused when tourists arrive. It's a total romp. More serious is *Vanua-Tai of Land and Sea*, a film about turtle conservation in north Efate.

Dances & Ceremonies

Traditional dances in Vanuatu require constant rehearsals. The timing is exquisite and the movements regimented, everyone turning, leaping and stomping together. Thus harmony and cooperation develop between people and villages. There are two major styles of dance: impersonation and participation. Impersonation dances require more rehearsal, as each dancer pretends to be an ancestor or legendary figure and wears elaborate masks or headdresses, such as in the Rom dances of Ambrym (see p791). In participatory dances, several people – or even several villages – take part to enact

traditional themes such as hunting, war and death, as in the Toka dances of Tanna.

Literature

There are some fabulous reads, guaranteed to put you in the mood for your visit to Vanuatu.

James Michener's novel *Tales of the South Pacific* depicts life in Santo when US forces were garrisoned there during WWII. *Beachmasters* by Thea Astley has many interesting parallels to the events of the 1980 Santo rebellion. Gwendoline Page's very readable *Coconuts and Coral* is a detailed and often amusing account of life in the New Hebrides during the 1960s as seen by a young English family.

The Talking Tree by Fepai Kolia is a poetry book that takes a stark look at ni-Van life. *The Story of the Eel & Other Stories* are delightful myths and local legends from Uripiv Island. *Pacific* by Judy Nunn is a tale of love and passion that tracks the lives of two women in Vanuatu, one a WWII heroine, the other a young Australian actor.

Music

String bands developed during WWII, when ni-Vans heard the US soldiers playing bluegrass. The singing is done with a pinched throat, forming that high-pitched lyrical note. Musicians are getting recognition, and sound studios and training rooms are being established on many islands. You're bound to hear the big hit *Jewel in a Crown* by the Nauten Boys of Tanna, who sing a mix of reggae, country and rock, with an off beat that is a typical Toka dance rhythm – Vanuatu is the jewel.

The *tamtam* (slit-drum) is Vanuatu's most interesting musical device. *Tamtam* are carved logs with hollowed-out slits. They typically have a representation of a human face carved above the drum part.

Painting & Sand Drawing

Petroglyphs and rock paintings are the country's most ancient forms of pictorial art. The former are common and widespread, although their meanings have been lost and their main significance these days is to archaeologists. Several islands have caves where the walls are decorated with hand stencils and simple paintings of animals.

Styles of painting include bark art in the Banks Islands. Body painting is also popular throughout the country as part of various traditional ceremonies.

Ni-Vans create beautiful sand drawings, making many delicate loops and circles without raising their finger, to leave messages or illustrate local legends, songs or ceremonies. The most elaborate and picturesque versions are made in Ambrym. Drawings may be public or sacred, and they have World Heritage status.

Traditional Dress

In *kastom*-oriented parts of Tanna and Pentecost, men still wear *namba* (penis sheaths) every day, while women dress in grass skirts. On Santo, the men wear *mal mal* (loincloths), while some women wear an apron of leaves. In southern Malekula, women of the Small Nambas people traditionally wear raffia skirts woven from banana-tree fibres.

In other parts of Vanuatu, grass skirts are fashioned from the bark of the *burao* (wild hibiscus). Once it's stripped, the bark is placed in sea water, dried, measured into lengths and, if necessary, dyed.

However, most ni-Vans only wear traditional dress to attend ceremonies, when elaborate headgear is also worn. Masks are usually made from tree-fern material and represent the faces of demons and ancestral spirits. Others are constructed out of clay reinforced with coconut fibres and layered onto a wickerwork frame.

Painted tree-fern face-masks in southern Malekula are decorated with feathers and carved pigs' tusks.

Weaving

Baskets and mats are made throughout the country, as are traps for fish, birds and shellfish. Weaving is done mostly by women, using pandanus leaves and *burao* stalks. Wicker, coconut leaves and rattan are used when a more robust item is required.

LANGUAGE

Bislama, a form of pidgin English, is Vanuatu's national language. English and French are also widely spoken, and schools teach in French or English. But Vanuatu also has the highest concentration in the world of different local languages per head

of population. There are 106, and 81 are still actively spoken. It's extraordinary to meet young people who are illiterate (schooling costs heaps) yet can speak a dozen languages fluently.

Bislama basics

Hello.	<i>Alo.</i>
Hello (to a group).	<i>Alo olgeta.</i>
Good morning.	<i>Gud morning.</i>
Good night.	<i>Gud naet.</i>
Goodbye/See you.	<i>Bae/mi lukem yu.</i>
How are you?	<i>Olsem wanem?</i>
Good thanks.	<i>I gud nomo tankyu tumas.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Tankyu tumas.</i>
Yes.	<i>Olraet.</i>
No thank you.	<i>No. I olraet tankyu tumas.</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>Yu tok tok Engglis?</i>
Sorry, I don't understand.	<i>Sore, mi no save.</i>
My name is...	<i>Nem blong mi...</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Vanuatu lies squarely on the Pacific Ring of Fire, so it gets frequent earth tremors, and rises or subsides by up to 2cm per year in some areas. There are nine active volcanoes (seven on land), and fumaroles and thermal springs are found throughout the archipelago.

Animals

Cats, dogs, cattle, horses, pigs and goats were all introduced to Vanuatu and have since gone wild. Rats are the bane of village life and do much damage to the copra industry.

Native land mammals are restricted to four flying-fox species and eight bat species. What Vanuatu lacks in native mammals, it makes up for in marine life, with over 300 species of coral and more than 450 species of reef fish. The country's largest resident mammal is the dugong, or sea cow, which is the world's only herbivorous marine mammal.

Of Vanuatu's 121 bird species, 55 can be found in Santo, which is home to the biggest variety, including all seven of the country's endemics. One very interesting species is the mound-building, fowl-like megapode (*namalao* in Bislama). It uses the warm volcanic soils to incubate its eggs. See p558 for more details.

There are 19 native lizards, all small skinks and geckoes, and one land snake, the harm-

less Pacific boa, which grows to 2.5m. While the yellow-bellied and banded sea snakes are both extremely venomous, their small mouths and teeth aren't at all suitable for savaging humans.

The saltwater (or estuarine) crocodiles that live in Vanua Lava have probably swum down from the Solomon Islands after losing their bearings during cyclones.

Plants

About 75% of the country is covered by natural vegetation, including rainforest and rain-shadow grasslands. Cyclones tear at the jungle regularly, renewing it. Logging and subsistence farming hacks into a bit, but much of the country is a botanical wonderland.

BEST EATING

Thanks largely to its French influence, Vila is well known in the Pacific for its international cuisine. The main supermarkets all carry a good range of local and imported food and drink. For an exquisite dining experience with a mix of picturesque surroundings, rippling water and fantastic flavour treats, start with these Vila restaurants.

- Right on the harbour, the Waterfront Bar & Grill (p774) has a great alfresco atmosphere.
- Vila Chaumières Restaurant (p774) offers romantic waterside dining.
- Le Café du Village (p774), on the sea wall, is a peaceful spot with French cuisine.
- Paradise Cove Italian Restaurant (p774) serves delicious meals.
- Overlooking the water, Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (p774) offers great food in a stunning building.

Outside Luganville and Vila, a restaurant is a small room where women serve one meal all day, flavoured with fresh herbs and coconut. Larger villages have general stores selling guitar strings, tinned mackerel and biscuits, but there's excellent bread everywhere. Most places have markets, so if you're cooking, look for the excellent *Island Edibles* by Judy MacDonnell.

The lord of most forests is the *banyan*, whose crown can be 70m or more across. Forests of mighty *kauri* trees are found on Erromango, while cloud forests dripping with moss and moisture are a magnificent feature of many highland areas.

Vanuatu has around 20 species of palm, of which 14 are endemic. Orchids festoon the trees in many areas; there are 158 orchid species.

Less enchanting are the introduced weeds. Lantana and the widespread American 'mile-a-minute' vine are the worst. The latter was brought from the US as a camouflage plant during WWII, but it's been left to overrun everything.

Conservation Areas

There are four official conservation areas: Vatthe (p800) and Loru (p800) on Santo, the *kauri* reserve (p784) on Erromango, and the cloud-forest area around Lake Manaro on Ambae (p803). For information on these areas, contact the **Environment Unit** (☎ 25302; fax 23565; PMB 9063, Georges Pompidou Bldg, Port Vila) in Port Vila, or its **Luganville office** (☎ 36153).

Local chiefs and *kastom* landholders often proclaim conservation areas as a means of protecting some valuable resource, such as turtles or coconut crabs, from overexploitation.

EFATE

pop 45,000 / area 915 sq km

This is Vanuatu's heart, a central island that buzzes with activities – tourist, commercial, industrial and educational. Its varied coastline offers bays and inlets, islands and islets, cliffs and crevices. Efate is the tourists' soft option, unlike the other islands, where the adventures are wild and woolly. It has two of the best deep-water anchorages, Vila Bay and Havannah Harbour, the principal airport, and the national capital, Port Vila.

Port Vila – the face of Vanuatu, better-known around the world than Efate or even Vanuatu itself – is a tourist treasure-trove. It's a pretty town with a great climate, spectacular views, gorgeous hotels and restaurants, and an exciting range of activities and events.

EFATE IN...

Two Days

Spend the whole first day wandering around the centre. Take the walk (p767), eat or have a drink at as many restaurants as you can, and check out the notice board at Iririki Island Resort (p773) for the night's entertainment. At about 6pm, head to a kava bar for a shell or two, then go outside the city, to Tamanu perhaps, for dinner.

Next morning, join a day tour out on a yacht. When you return, try a Melanesian feast at one of the cultural villages.

Four Days

With two more days, some scuba diving and an ecotour (p770) with Pascal are unmissable. Use the afternoons to visit the cultural centre (p767), and Mele-Maat Cascades (p769), where you must do an abseil down the waterfall (p771). Eat at a restaurant with entertainment, like Flaming Bull Steakhouse (p774), then cross the road for some action at Trader Vic's (p774). On the last night, dine at a restaurant with great ambience, such as Roxy's (p773) on Erakor or Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (p774).

One Week

You have three more days? Great. First take a day tour around the island (p771). If you can, extend it to spend a night on Nguna, for a great village experience. Spend another full day out fishing and your last day back in town, shopping at the markets and duty-free shops.

Maps

The **Drug Store** (☎ 22789; Lini Hwy) in Port Vila sells the 1:200,000 map of Vanuatu published by South Pacific Maps, distributed in Australia through **Hema Maps** (☎ 07-3340 0000). The **Vanuatu Tourism Office** (VTO; ☎ 22813; Lini Hwy) has free maps of Efate and Port Vila.

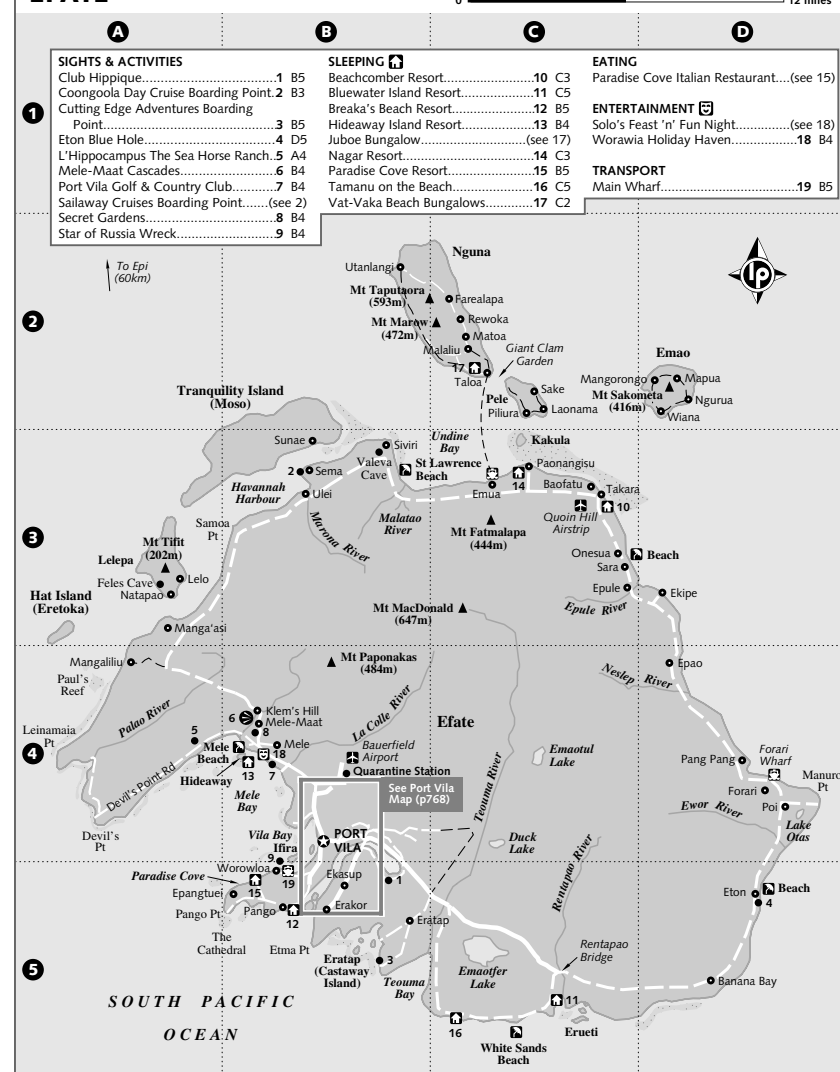
INFORMATION

The following are all in Port Vila; see the map, p768.

Bookshops

Centrepont supermarket (Lini Hwy) For French magazines and newspapers.

EFATE



Stop Press (☎ 22232; Au Bon Marché, Nambatu; stoppress@vanuatu.com.vu; ☎ 6am-7.30pm) For Australian and British newspapers and magazines, paperbacks, reference and travel material.

Internet Access

Cyber Village (☎ 27728; cyber@vatu.com; Nambatu; Internet per min 15Vt; ☎ 7am-10pm) An attractive

complex with a fish pond, salad bar, café and wireless technology. Get 24-hour access to a prepaid hotspot. There are showers for tourists and cheap international phone calls.

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; tourshop@vanuatu.com.vu; per min 15Vt; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) The e-tourism centre has a bank of good computers with fast connections.

Medical Services

Drug Store (☎ 22789; 🕒 7.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, to noon Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) This well-stocked pharmacy is tops.

Pro Medical (☎ 25566) A 24-hour paramedic service with Vanuatu's decompression chamber.

Vila Central Hospital (☎ 22100) Has a dentist, private practitioners and a dispensary; it's open for outpatients during business hours.

Money

Foreign exchange is provided by **ANZ** (☎ 22536; 🕒 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) and **Westpac** (☎ 22084; 🕒 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri). They both have ATMs.

Goodies Money Exchange (☎ 23445; goodies@vanuatu.net.vu; cnr Lini Hwy & rue Pasteur; 🕒 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–4pm Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) Generally gives the best rates. Check out the great carvings.

National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV; ☎ 22201; rue de Paris) Can also handle foreign exchange.

Post

Post office (☎ 22000; Lini Hwy) Poste restante, stamp counter, Internet facilities (25Vt per minute), card-operated phones outside, and private phone and fax booths inside.

Tourist Information

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; PO Box 949; www.tourvanuatu.com; 🕒 8am–8pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun) Backpacker specialist for accommodation; tours; bookings on outer islands; and scooter, mountain bike and tent hire.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO; ☎ 22813, 22515; www.vanuatutourism.com; 🕒 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Information about accommodation, activities, tours and the outer islands.

Travel Agencies

Tour operators offering information and bookings for Efate and the outer islands are along Lini Hwy. They include:

Adventure Centre (☎ 22743; fax 27763; www.adventurevanuatu.com)

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Island Safaris (☎ /fax 23288, 26779; www.vanuatu tourism.com/)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Around

See p808 for details of airline and shipping services to and from Vila.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Airport shuttle buses cost 400Vt per person to/from Vila, and taxis offer rates from 600Vt to 1000Vt (shared). If you don't have much

luggage, you can catch a minibus (100Vt) from outside the domestic terminal.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vila's car-hire companies include **Avis** (☎ 22570; Olympic Bldg), **Budget** (☎ 23170; rue d'Artois, Nambatu) and **Discount Rentals** (☎ 23242, 24475; Lini Hwy, Nambatu). A four-seater vehicle costs around 6500Vt (including VAT and insurance) a day.

Scooters can be hired through **Nautilus Scooter Hire** (☎ 22398; Lini Hwy) and **Zuma Scooter Hire** (☎ 25609, 41000; Lini Hwy). Prices are typically 4100Vt a day. You will be given a map showing the boundaries between public roads and tracks that are private property.

MINIBUS & TAXI

The main roads are usually thick with minibuses between 6am and 7.30pm. Fares are a uniform 100Vt in town. To travel further afield to, say, Hideaway Island costs 200Vt. There are also many taxis offering a competitive service (p808).

Vila's main taxi stands are beside the market and Iririki Wharf.

PORT VILA

pop 38,000

Climbing steep hillsides around horseshoe-shaped Vila Bay, Port Vila offers stunning views around every corner. It was declared the seat of the newly proclaimed Condominium government in 1906, so it has some charming colonial buildings. With its faded French atmosphere and beautiful harbour, Vila is one of the South Pacific's most attractive towns.

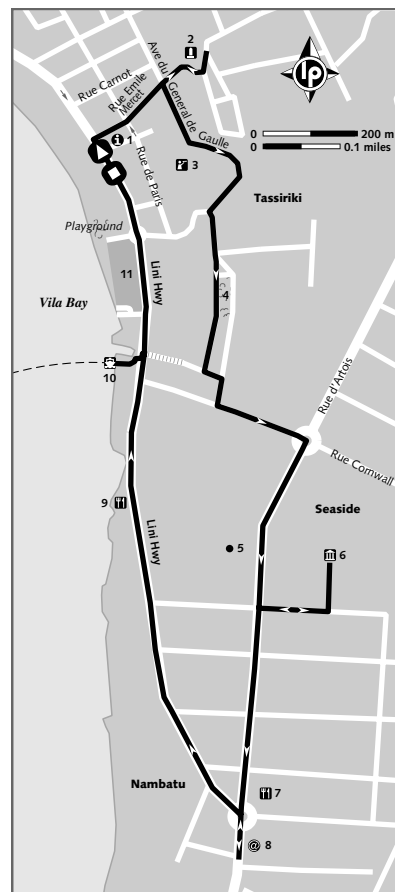
Orientation

Vila's main shopping precinct follows the shoreline for about 1km, so it's easily explored on foot. Lini Hwy, the main street, winds parallel to the waterfront. Rue Carnot and rue de Paris are known as Chinatown. You'll find anything there, from Japanese stereos to straw hats, Chinese cigarettes and balls of wool.

During WWII, US forces established radar stations known as Numbers One, Two and Three. Number Two and Number Three have been preserved in Bislama; Nambatu and Nambatri are now among Vila's plushest residential areas. 'Nambawan' is Independence Park.

Port Villa Walking Tour

From **Vanuatu's Tourism Office** (1), head north along Lini Hwy to the next street, rue Emile Mercet. A gentle stroll up the hill leads you away from the hustle and bustle to the lovely **WWI Memorial** (2). There's a stunning view from here. Go back down and turn left into Ave du General de Gaulle. A short distance along is a **Lookout Point** (3), where you can



WALK FACTS

Start Vanuatu Tourism Office

Finish Vanuatu Tourism Office

Distance 3km, plus ferry

Duration Two to three hours

consider the view from a different angle. Continue along the avenue, past **Independence Park** (4) on your left. At the T-junction, turn away from the harbour, east up to the roundabout at rue d'Artois. Turn right into rue d'Artois and follow it for a block. Note **Parliament House** (5) on your right. Turn left and then left again. The stunning building ahead is the **National Museum of Vanuatu** (6). Spend some time in the museum. It's a small, friendly place, where you'll get some fascinating insights into the local culture.

Back on rue d'Artois, enjoy a shady walk in this lovely tree-lined street, typical of Nambatu, until you reach **La Pizzeria** (7). Drop in for a drink, or lunch, and a chat. Refreshed, cross the road and visit **Cyber Village** (8), behind the little fish pond: it has Internet access, an art shop and a salad bar. Return to the V-junction and head downhill along Lini Hwy to sparkling new (burnt down and just rebuilt) **Waterfront Bar** (9), a top spot for another drink. You can edge your way along the sea wall, deciding which yacht you'd like to sail away on, then walk back to Lini Hwy and down into Vila. On your left is the **ferry to Iririki** (10). Head across for an island and water connection. Back on the mainland, go to the glorious **outdoor market** (11). Spend the rest of your time here, then continue along Lini Hwy back to the tourism office.

Sights

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF VANUATU

This excellent **museum and cultural centre** (☎ 22129; www.vanuatu culture.org; rue d'Artois; adult/child 500/100Vt; 🕒 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, to noon Sat) is home to a well-displayed selection of traditional artefacts, including items such as *tamtam*, massive outrigger canoes, ceremonial headdresses and examples of Lapita and Wusi pottery. There are photographic displays, and you can watch videos about traditional ceremonies and legends.

MARKETS

Vila's colourful **outdoor market** is open round the clock from Monday to noon on Saturday. You can buy fruit and vegetables (at rock-bottom prices), flowers, jewellery, woodcarvings and souvenirs. A pleasant grassy area follows the harbour wall past the playground to **Nambawan Market & Café** (☎ 44826; café@nambawan.com), where there's wireless Internet access, snacks, ice creams and handicrafts.

kastom dancing show off the colourful costumes. The **feast nights** (adult/child 3100/1550Vt; ☎ 5pm Fri) include a few shells of kava, fun entertainment and interesting food.

Activities

BOATING

The following options are available:

Coongoola Day Cruise (☎ 25020; www.southpacificcruise.com.vu; adult/child/diver 7800/3900/8800Vt) A great day on *Lady of the Sea*, once the mother ship for the Sydney–Hobart yacht race. Dive or snorkel at Tranquillity Island (Map p765) and see the turtle sanctuary.

Cutting Edge Adventures (Map p765; ☎ 22176; cutting@vanuatu.com.vu) Got muscles, will travel. Brilliant half- to 10-day trips in inflatable kayaks around the coast, or river kayaking (half/full day from 3800/7400Vt).

IslandDreams Glass Bottom Sea Kayaking (☎ 23050; www.evergreen.com.vu; adult/child 4000/2000Vt; ☎ 9am & 2pm) Head out from pretty Mele Bay to a sand island, as marine life passes underneath.

Meridian Charters (☎ 25595, 83352; www.meridiancharters.com) Takes you on a 60ft motor yacht at dusk. Food and French wines; very romantic.

Semi Submarine (☎ 43144; adult/child/family 2000/1200/5500Vt; ☎ 9am–3pm Tue–Sat) See the sea from a deep viewing chamber. Leaves from the wharf at Le Café du Village (p774).

Vanuatu Jet (☎ 26426; www.vanuatujet.com) Sideways slides, fishtails – hang on tight. It's available for high-speed transfers too.

GAME & REEF FISHING

Vanuatu's waters and the available choices (game and reef, liveaboard, remote island) mean your time on the deep blue will be memorable (shared half-/whole-day trips start at around 17,000/32,000Vt).

Some operators (all meeting-point arrangements are made when you book) include the following options:

Crusoe Fishing Adventures (☎ 22439, 45490; www.crusoefishing.com.vu) *Horizon* is a spacious Capricorn Classic 42ft cruiser, with the latest hi-tech equipment, set up for all weather conditions.

Lelepa Island Fishing Charters (☎ 22714; www.lelepatours.com; whole day from 7000Vt) Operates a 7m Banana Boat; includes snorkelling and Lelepa Island tour.

Ocean Blue (☎ 41415; www.oceanblue.com.vu) A fleet of fishing vessels that includes Black Watch 40s, with first-class seagoing capabilities.

SCUBA DIVING

Efate's dive sites include wrecks, coral reefs, deep drop-offs, caverns and swim-throughs,

such as the Cathedral, a warren of underwater holes, stipples and tunnels; Paul's Reef, with sheer walls of coral down an extinct submarine volcano; and the *Star of Russia*, an iron-hulled schooner with masts and hull still intact, home to thousands of colourful fish.

Introductory dives start at around 6500Vt; dives for certified divers are less. Operators: **Hideaway Island Marine Sanctuary** (☎ 22963; www.hideaway.com.vu) On the beach at Hideaway Island, in front of the resort (Map p765).

Nautilus Scuba (☎ 22398; www.nautilus.com.vu; Lini Hwy) Great resources. Ask about the bunkhouse accommodation for divers at the site, which is included in the dive package.

Sailaway Cruises (☎ 25155; www.sailawayvanuatu.com; trips 7900Vt) A fabulous day trip on the *Golden Wing*, a trimaran, for snorkelling or diving at Hat Island (Eretoka) and Paul's Rock. See the map, p765, for the meeting point.

HORSE RIDING

Rainforest rides, gentle beach walks and sunset trails (from 11am to 5.30pm except Monday, one hour/full day from 2500/8500Vt) are offered by:

Club Hippique (Map p765; ☎ 23347; lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu)

L'Hippocampus the Sea Horse Ranch (Map p765; ☎ 25152, 40102; lhippocampus@vanuatu.com.vu)

SPORTING CENTRES & CLUBS

Port Vila Tennis Club (Cercle Sportif; ☎ 22437; Rte du Stade) Has five hard courts, two squash courts, beach volleyball, aerobics and yoga classes, and a gym.

Port Vila Golf & Country Club (☎ 22564; www.vanuatu.com.vu/~pvgcc; Rte de Mele) A challenging course with palm-tree and ocean-front hazards, and an excellent 19th hole overlooking Mele Bay. It's 3500Vt for 18 holes, including club and buggy hire.

WALKING & CYCLING

Pascal Guillet of **EcoTours** (☎ 25299, 45596; www.vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu; half-day tours from 2500Vt) will lead you along off-road tracks, through farms, down cascades, into rock pools and along riverbanks. Cycling tours are grand adventures through villages, in and out of outriggers to cross rivers and lagoons, and up to mountain tops. EcoTours also offers outer-island bike tours. When you book, Pascal will make arrangements to pick you up for the tour.

THE PLAY'S THE THING Zayne D'Crus

On a wooden stage in a crowded theatre, four young women tell the stories of their lives. The first is a sex worker, the second a family woman, the third views life through the filter of her religion, and the fourth is regularly beaten by her husband.

Through their stories, the mixed audience comes to understand the changing roles of men and women in ni-Vanuatu society, the hopes and expectations people bring into relationships, and how hard it is for women to make something of their lives in a patriarchal society.

This play, *Solid Sistas*, is presented by Wan Smol Bag Theatre (p761). Over the last two years, this community organisation has used theatre, drama, film and radio to raise awareness of issues such as HIV/AIDS, women's rights, health, and the environment, and to effect social change in Vanuatu.

South Australian Vita Maiorano is one of Wan Smol Bag Theatre's project managers, on a two-year assignment with Australian Volunteers International (AVI). Her role involves managing and dispensing funds spent on new projects and reporting to Wan Smol Bag's many local and international donors.

Vita, 33, is one of 20 AVI volunteers working in Vanuatu. While her role includes projects such as environmental management, river health and HIV/AIDS awareness, other AVI volunteers work as pharmacists, sports coordinators, accountants and nurses.

For Vita, volunteering offers the opportunity to settle down in a place and culture; to come to know it intimately. 'It took me six months to feel comfortable here, but now it certainly is home', she says, 'I'm always learning here, and I find out different things about myself each day'.

'To be successful as a volunteer, you need adaptability, resourcefulness, a bit of independence, a smile and a sense of humour!'

For information about Wan Smol Bag call ☎ 27119 or email reklaw@vanuatu.com.vu.

About Australian Volunteers International

Australian Volunteers International (AVI) is an international development organisation working in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. AVI volunteers empower local people by exchanging skills and supporting organisations that deliver essential services to communities.

For more information visit www.australianvolunteers.com, or call ☎ 1800 331 292 from within Australia.

ABSEILING & PARASAILING

The team at **Edge Abseiling Adventure Tour** (☎ 53153; www.edgevanuatu.com; tours 6500–14,000Vt) takes you down the Mele-Maat Cascades, into a canyon, on a Tyrolean traverse on Ifira or on a kayaking and abseiling adventure at Siviri. **Nautilus Parasailing** (☎ 22398, 43288; www.nautilus.com.vu; 7000Vt) takes you out over the sparkling waters. Like wow!

Vanuatu for Children

Children love Port Vila. The market is a kids' adventure world. Give them a few coins and watch them shop. Just across on the grass is the playground, then there are the submarine boats (opposite), where they sit in the glassy bottom and watch the fish.

Catch a bus to anywhere. Kids are so happy on the buses, and you'll quickly discover how much the ni-Vanuatu love children.

Erakor (p769) is a top spot. There's a great ferry ride across, and you can have a coffee on the little curved beach while your ankle biters sit in wet sand and build castles, surrounded by water and starfish.

Mele-Maat Cascades and the Secret Gardens will also interest the kids. So will the sharks at Bluewater Island Resort (p775). If they're old enough for kayaks and snorkelling, go out to Hideaway (p769) for the day – it's no good for littlies, as they can't walk on the coral and rock beach.

Then head off to Tanna (p779) – the flight is such an adventure, and Mt Yasur Volcano will absolutely fascinate them. They'll talk of little else for months.

Tours

There are many different tours; operators offer half-day to five-day trips. Go around Efate to swim at beautiful Eton beach,

cruise up Epule River, stop off to see fire-walking, or check out the amazing Valeva Cave at Undine Bay. Alternatively, visit Efate's small offshore islands for superb beaches and great coral reefs – snorkel gear, outrigger canoes and kayaks are provided. Witness a little of Vanuatu's culture on an overnight tour to an island bungalow.

Best of all, have a grand adventure to the outer islands, like a three-day trip to Tanna to witness nature's fireworks, to Santo for scuba diving, or overnight on Epi to swim with the dugong.

The comprehensive **VTO list** (www.vanuatu-tourism.com/vanuatu/cms/en/activities/tours.html) includes the following operators; make arrangements to be picked up from your hotel when you book.

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Horizon Tours (☎ 25053; horizon@vanuatu.com.vu)

Lelepa Island Day Tours (☎ 22714, 42714; www.lelepatours.com)

Melanesian Tours (☎ 26847; www.melanesiantours.com)

Sleeping

Vila and its surrounds has wonderful accommodation options. Many places offer free accommodation for children under 12, so always ask. Most rooms have a fridge.

BUDGET

Room With a View (☎ 23703, 51327; www.vanuatu-tourism.com; cnr Renee Pujol; PO Box 889; s/d/tr incl breakfast 4000/5000/6500Vt) This lovely colonial building has a balcony with the best views. Everyone eats out here, and you meet a

fascinating range of people from businessmen to Peace Corps workers. Mountain bikes and baby-sitters are available.

City Lodge (☎ 26826; citylodge@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d 3800/4700Vt) Location, location. If you're busy in the city, you'll find it's ideal to stay here. Besides, the minimalist rooms are bright and new, the en suites crisp and clean, and it's quiet, despite being so central.

Wild Pig (☎ 23696; www.wildpighotel.com; PO Box 1515; dm incl breakfast 2500Vt, r with bathroom/balcony/air-con 7000/8000/10,000Vt; ☎ ☎ ☎) The communal areas here are excellent: spacious dining room, sports bar, lounge bar, sparkling big pool with gazebo, communal kitchen and barbecue area.

Treetops Lodge & Bungalows (☎ 22944, 42944; swedcons@vanuatu.com.vu; dm/s/d incl breakfast from 1500/3000/4000Vt; ☎ ☎) It's relaxed, rustic and rusty with a great communal kitchen/living area set up on the veranda and views of Erakor Bay in the distance. Two gorgeous two-bedroom bungalows (6000Vt per night each), one with a mezzanine, are also available.

Note that Hideaway and Erakor Island Resorts offer excellent budget accommodation. For a seriously budget place with airy, clean rooms, good kitchen, and pleasant garden, try **Malampa Guesthouse** (☎ 23137, 48502; beds 1500Vt).

MIDRANGE

Fatumar Lodge (☎ 23456, 41576; www.fatumar.com; studio/family apt 14,000/22,000Vt; ☎ ☎ ☎) Your apartment represents an outer island – timber shutters fold back, so you're afloat on Fatumar Bay. It's tropical luxury at its best. Children love it here, with the pool, safe beach, TV room and big play room, where adults play too. It's a quick trip on the bus or a gentle stroll into town. Kayaks are available.

Olympic Hotel (☎ 22464; olympichotel@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy, PO Box 1537; standard s/d 6500Vt, studios with kitchenette 7200Vt; ☎ ☎) It's nothing exotic, but if you'd like to be right in the centre, the Olympic is quietly comfortable and spacious, with views over the main streets and harbour. Pop down the backstairs into El Gecko (p774) for coffee and meals.

Hideaway Island Resort (Map p765; ☎ 22963; fax 23867; www.hideaway.com.vu; dm/d 2875/7500Vt, studio/1-2-bedroom bungalow 13,800/18,750/30,000Vt; ☎ ☎) This place buzzes as divers, snorkellers and

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pacific Lagoon Apartments (☎ 23860; www.members.optusnet.com.au/pla32; PO Box 827; Pango Rd; 4-person lagoon/garden apt 14,500/12,000Vt; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is perfect for families, with attractive two-bedroom apartments set around two large grassy areas fronting the lagoon. Sunny bathrooms have little rock gardens, lounges are spacious, and kitchens are shiny-clean. There are kayaks, barbecues, great baby-sitting and a laundry service. The bus passes the end of the lane, and it's a minute's walk to the Erakor ferry.

boats come and go. The standard rooms open onto a wide veranda where everyone kicks back. The shared facilities are good, but there's no communal kitchen. The bungalows are spacious and open, with views over the water.

TOP END

Erakor Island Resort (☎ 26983; PO Box 24; www.erakor.vu; dm 2900Vt, superior/deluxe bungalows from 24,000/27,000Vt) Walk along a lantern-lit path to your interesting bungalow opening onto its own bit of waterfront. You're on one gorgeous 6.5-hectare island, with catamarans, outrigger canoes, snorkel gear etc (for hire or free for guests), or try the Get Wet Watersports – scuba diving and fishing. The lodge has spacious bunk rooms and a large kitchen; no matter what your budget you can enjoy Erakor.

Melanesian Port Vila (☎ 22150; fax 22678; www.melanesianportvila.com; orchid room 18,800Vt, self-contained studio/1-2-bedroom apt 16,000/21,000/22,400Vt, Presidential ste 24,800Vt; ☎ ☎ ☎) This place is delightfully tropical and great for families; spacious rooms open onto a fun pool and bar area. There are two restaurants, three bars and special nights: barbecues, kava tastings and cultural performances. All rates include breakfast.

Paradise Cove Resort (Map p765; ☎ 22701; www.paradisecoveresort.net; 1-2-bedroom bungalows 19,300/23,300Vt; ☎ ☎) An elegant spot with gorgeous traditional bungalows – with every luxury of course, like a little kitchen, too nice to use. Breakfast is served until early afternoon – honeymooners stay here. Snorkel gear is available, and diving if you're certified. The

resort is tucked away near Pango Point, but it's an easy trip into town.

Chantilly's on the Bay (☎ 27079; www.chantillysonthebay.com; Lini Hwy, PO Box 279; studio/apt/sunlover d 18,000/20,000/22,000Vt; ☎ ☎) A sparkling boutique hotel, its nautical-influenced building sitting prettily on Vila Bay with its own private jetty. All 20 rooms have balconies with terrific bay views, kitchenette and satellite TV. Be totally decadent and ask for the sunlover apartment with extended deck. Children are welcome; baby-sitters are available.

Then there are the Big Three, offering a full range of facilities in lovely grounds. **Iririki Island Resort** (☎ 23388; fax 23880; www.iririki.com) is child free. **Le Meridien** (☎ 22040; www.lemeridien.com/vanuatu/port_vila/hotel_vu1668.shtml) and **Le Lagon** (☎ 22313; www.lelagonvanuatu.vu) have casinos and good accommodation deals for children under 13. See their websites for the bigger picture and package-deal details.

Eating

Dining out in Vila is a delight, with great food, friendly staff and glorious views. The following is just a taste.

QUICK EATS

Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway (☎ 27207; takeaway food from 200Vt, upstairs mains 990-1550Vt; ☎ 6am-10pm) This is the best place for fast food. Upstairs, the restaurant is gorgeous, especially at dusk when lights twinkle on the water. The lunch meal and Tusker specials are always excellent.

Au Pêche Mignon (☎ 27271; meals 500-700Vt; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) A very French patisserie with mushroom pizza you'll keep going back for and cheesecake you should order in advance in case it sells out.

Daily Pizza (☎ 26907; Nangaria House; dishes or pizzas 550-1450Vt; ☎ 6.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) An interesting variety of fresh meals is on offer here, including pizzas and Vietnamese shrimp rolls and dumplings.

RESTAURANTS

Rossi Restaurant (☎ 22528; www.therossi.com; mains 1450-3500Vt; ☎ 6am-late) A Vila institution, the Rossi is like a towering atrium with glass doors opening onto the harbour. The food is excellent: always reliable, always tempting you to return.

Roxy's on the Lagoon (☎ 26983; mains 1450-2250Vt; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) Sit in this gorgeous restaurant

PITTER-PATTER

These three totally gorgeous child-free places are way too romantic for the pitter-patter of tiny feet. Absorb the ambience in rambling gardens, on a sun-drenched balcony, in a lazing pool or paddling on the lagoon.

Breaka's Beach Resort (Map p765; ☎ 23670; www.breakas.com; garden/beachfront bungalow 21,000/25,000Vt; ☎ ☎)

Sunset Bungalows (☎ 29968; fax 29970; www.sunset-bungalows.com; superior/ste bungalows 28,700/35,000Vt; ☎ ☎)

Vila Chaumières (☎ 22866; vilchaum@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr 12,500/12,500/15,500Vt; ☎ ☎)

and gaze out over the lagoon as you enjoy the chef's best. It has an extensive menu and pleasant surroundings; check out the special nights.

L'Houstalet (☎ 22303; meals 1300-2700Vt; 🍴 dinner) Famous for 30 years for its flying fox and wild pigeon, L'Houstalet offers much more: a great atmosphere, large, comfortable armchairs and an exciting menu.

La Pizzeria (☎ 24763; mains 400-1350Vt; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This simple little place has great comfort food, such as the best osso buco or fish curry you've ever had. It's a popular spot with expats, and for pizza (eat in or take away).

Flaming Bull Steakhouse (mains 1000-1600Vt; 🍴 noon-11pm) The steak here is impossible to beat. Add the big hug from the waiter and the outrageous atmosphere, and you too will keep coming back. Local bands play love songs for you.

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; mains 1500-2900Vt; 🍴 11am-late) This is *the* place for yachtsies, and everyone who loves good food. Right on the harbour, the Waterfront has a fun atmosphere and live music.

Vila Chaumières Restaurant (☎ 22866; mains 1800-3750Vt; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Sitting romantically over palm-fringed and flood-lit Emden Lagoon, Vila Chaumières serves tasty French meals with some English staples. Be sure to book, and ask for a waterside table.

Le Café du Village (☎ 27789; mains 1300-2000Vt; 🍴 8am-10pm) Housed in pretty French-colonial buildings against a sea wall, Le Café has tempting Mediterranean and French meals.

Paradise Cove Italian Restaurant (Map p76; mains 1250-2400Vt; 🍴 7.30am-9pm) This place spreads under a soaring natural roof. After a delicious meal, take your drinks down to the gazebo – it's great at sunset.

Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (☎ 29968; mains 1700-2200Vt; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sit out over the water to eat an entire lobster drizzled with a sweet chilli concoction. Oh, yum.

Wild Pig Restaurant (☎ 23696; mains 1400-1600Vt; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The chef here is famous for his beef Wellington. Quite the best you'll ever have. Eat in the splendid restaurant or out in the gazebo.

Les Alizé's Restaurant (☎ 24306; mains 1700-2200Vt; 🍴 7.30am-9pm) Up here in the hills, it's magical to watch the lights of Port Vila twinkle below. Meals are magic, too. If you

book, you will be picked up and returned for free.

El Gecko (☎ 25597; mains 1100-1550Vt; 🍴 6am-10pm Mon-Sat) Here it's relaxed courtyard dining with fabulous food, a great menu, and such friends for waiters. Try the garlic and brown sugar on poulet with *kumula* (sweet potato) mash and veg.

Drinking

Vila has a few good bars and an abundance of kava bars.

Office Pub (☎ 11.30am-3am Tue-Sat, from 5pm Sun & Mon) The town's only true pub has a cosy atmosphere: booths, wooden sculptures and an old English bar where people chat. Outside is the Flaming Bull (left) and live music.

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; 🍴 11am-late) Live music plays well into the night here. It's just been rebuilt, so does the resident cat still ring the ship's bell when it wants attention? Go and check.

Anchor Inn (☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, to 2am Sat & Sun) A great beer garden that buzzes, especially when international sports are on. It's home to the **Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club** (www.vanuatucruisingyachtclub.org), so you'll hear all the yachting gossip.

Trader Vic's (☎ 26800; Lini Hwy; 🍴 4.30pm-3am Tue-Sat) Touted as the town's premier bar/nightclub, Trader Vic's is one grand beer garden, with a steaming disco room off the sports-bar area. There are live bands, Foxtel showing all sports, a pool table, darts and karaoke. Age at the R&D disco is late teens to 30s. Women should take a friend.

The sunset kava cup (small/large 50/100Vt), served in a coconut shell or plastic bowl, is a ritual. Try it out at **Ron's Nakamal** (Nambatu) or the Sea Side Kava Bar (behind the hospital).

Entertainment

Many places offer feasts on set nights which include kava tasting, string bands and *kastom* dancers. Try **Solo's Feast 'n' Fun Night** (adult/child 2500/1225Vt; 🍴 5pm Thu), out at **Worawia Holiday Haven** (☎ 25498; www.resort-vanuatu.com), near Mele town. Mr and Mrs Solomon from the local village prepare traditional food in a ground oven, unfolding and explaining the dishes while you try some kava. Then join in the dancing – it's a great night.

Shopping

Hebrida Market Place (Lini Hwy) This fun place is jam-packed with hand-painted clothes, hand-made souvenirs, and woven bags and mats.

L'atelier (Hebrida Market Place) The perfect place to start looking for wooden carvings and handicrafts.

Philippe Metois Photography (Lini Hwy) Buy Vanuatu captured at its best – unframed prints start at 1250Vt, framed at 10,000Vt.

There are a number of shops selling duty-free products on Lini Hwy between the market and the northern end of the central business district. In general, these are reasonable for alcohol, perfume, fine china and jewellery, but not so great on electrical goods.

AROUND EFATE

It's a pleasant, somewhat bumpy road north, mainly following the coast and passing coconut plantations, cattle stations and rocky inlets. There are superb views from Klem's Hill, 200m above sea level.

Stores are scarce outside Vila. Most people live off their own garden produce, which you can sample at roadside stalls – just leave your money in the box.

If you are hiring a car, watch out for the slalom moments in the northwest and water-logged sections in the south – fill up before you go. There are no petrol stations.

White Sands Beach

East of Vila, just past Teouma River (Efate's largest), a right-hand turn takes you down to the coastal road.

White Sands Beach, fringed with screw-trunked pandanus palms, is rather exposed but does have a few good **snorkelling** and **swimming** spots.

Tamanu on the Beach (☎ 27279; fax 24470; www.tamanuonthebeach.com; planters/beachfront incl breakfast 16,500/19,000Vt; 🍴) This small resort is gorgeous: five luxurious French-colonial cottages with magnificent polished boards running out to little love-nest porches. Use the bikes, then swim in rock pools or the Pacific Ocean. The restaurant's good reputation is definitely deserved, with great food (mains 2050Vt to 2650Vt) and a pleasant setting, right on the beach. It's open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Rentapao River

Cutting Edge Adventures (p770) offers excellent half-day **kayaking** trips here. If you're game, you can get in and swim with fish and massive sea turtles in Bluewater Island Resort's open-air **aquarium** (nonguest adult/child 850/425Vt). In a separate pool are beautiful reef sharks.

The large development of 49 shiny and modern bungalows at **Bluewater Island Resort** (☎ 27606; www.bluewaterisland.com; garden/river/lagoon d 9500/11,000/12,000Vt; 🍴 🍴) is wrapped around a blue lagoon. The resort has kayaks, snorkel gear and sports facilities; transfers are free. There's also a lodge with double rooms and a communal kitchen (doubles cost 4000Vt). The double rate includes accommodation for two adults and a child, as well as breakfast.

Eton Blue Hole

Continue on around to the east coast and you'll find this lovely **swimming and snorkelling spot** (admission per person 300Vt) near Eton. There are toilets and a change room.

Takara

The waters out from **Takara**, with the prevailing southeast winds, offer ideal conditions for **kitesurfing**. Ring ☎ 23576 for daily weather reports.

Two **US WWII fighter planes** lie in the shallows close to nearby Baofatu. They ran out of fuel coming in to land at Quoin Hill. **Matanawora WWII Relics** (Takara) is a dusty but fascinating little display. Ask about the local **store** where artists work and exhibit their tapestries, carvings and hand-painted goods. Alternatively, visit a **cannibal site**, watch men walk on fire or dive off cliffs, or see a floating stone island that's the size of a house.

Narasaed Adventure Tours (☎ /fax 27555; narasaed@vanuatu.com.vu) takes you on a range of very unusual experiences, plus more standard ones, such as fishing, kitesurfing and kayaking. **Horizon Tours** (☎ 25600; adult/child 4200/2100Vt) arranges tours that include swimming and snorkelling around one of the WWII planes.

Allen Noppert runs the great **Beachcomber Resort** (☎ 23576; fax 26458; beachc@vanuatu.com.vu; Takara; lodge s/d 4400/6800Vt, bungalows from dm/s/d/tr 3000/5300/9000/9600Vt; 🍴), which has a hot mineral pool alongside a cold swimming

pool – hydrotherapy fun. Sprawled well apart along the shoreline are a range of Western bungalows – some are self-contained (single/double/triple cost 7000/11,500/11,700Vt). The atrium restaurant (mains 1300Vt to 2100Vt; open from 7.30am till late) has its own hot pool and waterfall – swim to your plate of nibbles.

Paonangisu

This village is the best place to ask about a speedboat ride across to **Nguna**. The boats usually leave from nearby Emua and should be arranged in advance – either through Nagar Resort (see below) or a tour operator – to suit the tides.

Chief Joel of Emua village takes you on a **kayak adventure**, paddling across to Nguna for a Melanesian lunch, then returning in his motorboat. Contact **Island Stream Getaway** (☎ /fax 26445, ☎ 24786, 42702; kayak trips 5000Vt).

Nagar Resort (☎ 27986; fax 24936; s/d incl breakfast 5000/7000Vt, 2-bedroom f 9500Vt) is very relaxed on a quiet white-sand bay with Nguna and Pele as a backdrop. The tiny rock-base bungalows are really basic, but the family bungalow is a rambling affair with a bathtub! Bikes are available, and you can camp in the grounds. Transfers are 5000Vt. The licensed restaurant (mains 850Vt to 1450Vt; open for lunch and dinner) is a great place to stop for lunch on a round-island trip; eat al fresco under the trees.

A taxi to here from Vila costs 5000Vt.

Siviri

At Undine Bay is white-sand **St Lawrence Beach** (300Vt), isolated and inviting, fringed with palm trees. Nearby is pretty **Siviri** known for its fragrant flowers. Explore **Valeva Cave** (admission per person 100Vt) in a kayak (1000Vt). It has chambers and tunnels and a beautiful underground lake. The villagers will show you the massive limestone boulder that was somehow moved by people, and the strange footprints engraved in the rock floor.

NGUNA

pop 1200

This little island has a very pretty traditional village, **Taloa**, that's waiting, with lots of accommodation and tourist attractions, to give you a taste of island life just a short hop from Vila. Locals reckon they run their

village successfully because of standards established by New Zealand (NZ) missionary Peter Milne.

Sights & Activities

Nguna has a long **white-sand beach** and a marine-protected area, with a labelled **snorkel trail** that follows past rich exotic coral gardens with all sorts of fish.

Guided hikes take you through village gardens to mountain peaks and lakes and to the beautiful **kastom treehouse**, built 20m up a 300-year-old *banyan*. Inside the treehouse is a conservatory of palms, ferns and flowers.

Utanlangi, by a sheltered cove, is the best place from which to climb the extinct volcano **Mt Taputaora** (593m). The climb is long and arduous, but you'll be rewarded with superb panoramas over the Shepherd Islands and much of Efate.

Great fun is going in an outrigger canoe to watch the villagers **turtle tagging**. Sponsor your own turtle, name it, and see it back into the ocean. The **Giant Clam Garden** was inspired by the one at the Maskelynes (p789).

Visit the chief's magnificent **nakamal**, built over 200 years ago. It has huge log supports and a soaring roof, one of the very last of its kind.

Sleeping & Eating

Vat-Vaka Beach Bungalows (☎ 22463, 23120; s incl all meals 2900Vt) It's only a few minutes from the mainland, but these bungalows make you realise you're an entire world away. Quaint and basic, they nestle into the landscape. Lanterns are supplied for light, and walk to the outhouse, where the flush toilet is pretty cute. Ask for Yoan Jay.

Juboe Bungalow (☎ 22219; s incl all meals 2900Vt) Right on the beach, this is one very spacious bungalow – the shower and toilet are in a separate little hut. The meals are yummy, and it's a two-minute stroll into the centre of the village, where you can organise some snorkelling or go on one of the tours. Ask for Emma Tasong.

Getting There & Around

Transport trucks from Vila leave from outside the Hua Chinese Store, near the police station, some time between 12.30pm and 1.30pm Monday to Friday (400Vt). The truck connects with a boat to the island

(400Vt). The return trip is early in the morning.

A taxi from Vila to the wharf at Emua is 5000Vt. Arrange a speedboat to Nguna (3000Vt) through Nagar Resort (opposite) or a tour operator.

EPI

pop 5000 / area 444 sq km

Epi is a fascinating island, just a hop, skip and jump from Efate. Arrive in the south and while away the hours in a rustic lodge watching for whales and dolphins to cross the small bay. Take a bumpy ride up north to Lamén Bay to do the whole watersport thing, including swimming with that loveable character, young Bondas, a gregarious dugong. It's an adventure island, where you become part of the village structure. Listen to the local lads pounding the kava ready for you to drink in the dusky *nakamal*; chat to the ladies of the village as they prepare their ground ovens and wrap the *laplap* in banana leaves; walk around to the conservation area,

where megapodes and turtles can lay their eggs in safety; and take long walks along the black-sand beach at Lamén Bay.

Transport

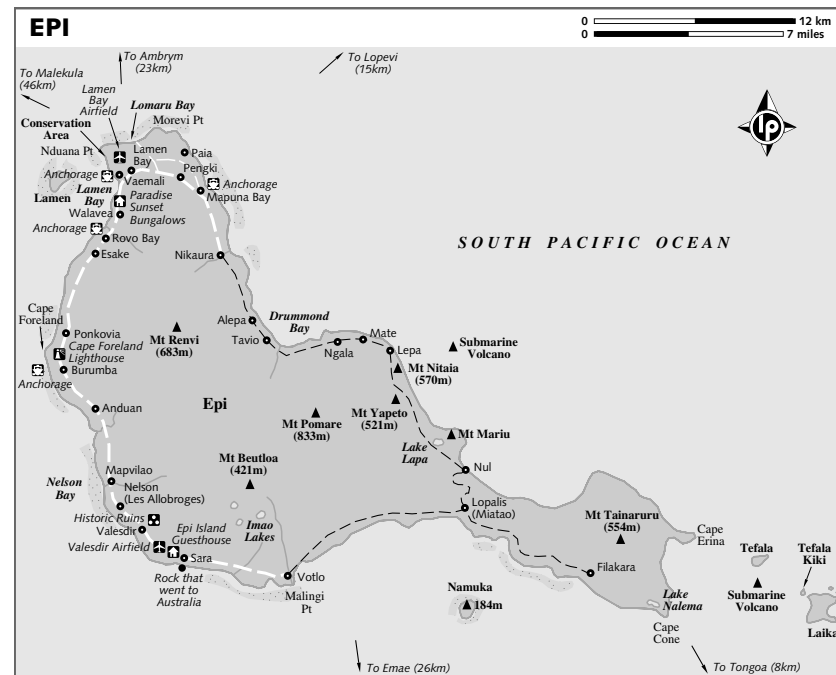
GETTING THERE & AWAY

Vanair (☎ 25025) flies from Vila to Valesdir on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday, and to Lamén Bay on Tuesday and Saturday. Some flights also stop at Tongoa. The Lamén Bay strip gives you a stunning introduction to the island as the plane comes in low over coral reefs and crystal-clear turquoise water.

For information on boats that call into Epi, see p809. There are several good anchorages in north Epi: Lamén Bay, Mapuna Bay, Rofo Bay, Walavea and Cape Foreland. All can be unsuitable depending on the wind direction.

GETTING AROUND

A good plan when visiting Epi is to fly to Lamén Bay, make your way down the west coast by taxi truck (6000Vt) and then fly out of Valesdir (or vice versa). Epi's roads



are basic, and the eastern half of the island only has walking tracks.

Sights & Activities

Lamen Bay is home to massive **sea turtles** and several **dugong**, including Bondas: if you can find him, he'll be happy to let you hang around and rub his tum – not vigorously, as his spiky coat will rip your fingers off. Ask your host about borrowing snorkel gear.

There are a few small stores selling limited groceries, as well as a fish shop behind the bungalows, a cold room selling ice cream and meat (ask for Isabelle's place), and a bakery.

Sea kayaks and outrigger canoes are available, or you can charter a fishing boat (5000Vt) to try your hand at **reef fishing**. **Spear fishing** is especially good at night – the locals will take you out. If you're into **gamefishing**, a small Kiri 8 can take you out trawling (half/full day 15,000/30,000Vt) or deep-sea fishing (15,000Vt per day).

Down south, **Valesdir** includes the Valesdir plantation, which produces copra and beef cattle. There are **historic ruins** of a mansion here. In the 1920s, Valesdir had its own coinage; one coin was marked 'five centimes' on one side, and 'six pence' on the other. For many years, there was a grand race day near the airstrip. Horses came from all over the Pacific.

In the tiny bay is the 'rock that went to Australia'. The locals tell about a boy who was sitting on the rock when he disappeared. He returned two years later with some clothes, a leg of bullock and tales about a trip to Australia.

The cliffs are so steep and the jungle so dense behind the plantations that, at dusk, you might only know you are approaching a village by the boom, boom, boom of

BON ANNÉE

All through January, villagers prepare long flower-embedded posts and set out together to walk as far as they can, dancing along, stopping at each village they pass to sing songs and chant, 'Happy, Happy, Bon Année'. Then they dust their listeners with talcum powder and set off to the next village.

the men pounding the kava in metal pipes; enjoy the twilight in a *nakamal* with a drink. If you can make up a group, enjoy an **island feast** with the local string band and *kastom* dancing.

On the western side of Epi are two **submarine volcanoes** that steam or bubble, and give the evening sky a deep scarlet glow.

Sleeping & Eating

Paradise Sunset Bungalows (☎ 28230; Lamen Bay; s/d incl all meals 5500/7200Vt, camping 500Vt) A relaxed and friendly place right on the bay, just a short walk from the airfield. The rooms and shared facilities are basic, but the food and the bay view are lovely. Tasso has snorkel gear, bikes and outriggers, and he will arrange tours. A truck to the airstrip is 200Vt. The restaurant (meals 1000Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is large and usually full of guests and visitors from the yachts in the bay, which makes for a fun evening.

Epi Island Guesthouse (☎/fax 28225; www.epi-island-guesthouse.com.vu; Valesdir; s incl all meals 8000Vt, camping 1000Vt) Enjoy rural life in total comfort in this arty, rustic lodge powered by a microhydro turbine. The central room is full of fascinating bits like 1865–75 Enfield guns once owned by blackbirders. A library, games and baby-sitting are available, and

you may see dolphins from the veranda. At Epi Moments Dining Room (meals 1500Vt to 1700Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) gourmet cuisine is whipped up by owner Alix.

TANNA

pop 33,000 / area 565 sq km

The Tannese are passionate about their island – and you will be, too. There are lush undisturbed rainforests, heady night-perfumed flowers, coffee plantations, plains where wild horses run with their foals, mountains, hot springs and waterfalls. Presiding over it all is fuming, furious Mt Yasur, one of the world's most accessible volcanoes. The local chiefs have formed marine and wildlife sanctuaries, and there are gardening, surfing, cycling, walking or volcano enthusiasts everywhere. Note that there are very serious quarantine controls – the island has no nasty bugs, so everything's grown without insecticides, herbicides or pesticides, and the locals want to keep it

that way. Christianity, cargo cult and *kastom* are important, and all natural phenomena have a fourth dimension of spirituality and mystique.

The entire island is a tourists' playground. So, when the volcano has finished working its magic on you, there are horses to ride, forests to trek through, waterfalls to stand under and a kilometre-deep drop-off tumbling with coral to snorkel along. Meet *kastom* villagers wearing *namba* and grass skirts, watch age-old festivals or just laze on a tropical island beach and watch the sun set.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Vanair's rather swish ATR42 flies between Vila and Tanna every morning. Another very little plane makes twice-weekly flights, landing also at Aniwa, Aneityum, Futuna and Erromango.

You can get package deals in Vila that typically include air fares, transfers, accommodation, all meals and visits to Mt Yasur and a *kastom* village (about 35,000Vt).

For boats that call into Tanna, see p809.

THE NEKOWIAR & TOKA CEREMONY

About every three years, come August, a great restlessness spreads across Tanna. The men scour the bush and villages for pigs and kava, counting, calculating. Finally one of the chiefs announces that his village will host the Nekowiar. Hooray. Romance is in the air. It will be a three-day extravaganza of song, dance and feasting during which the leaders of neighbouring villages organise marriages. Negotiations for the marriages continue for months afterwards.

Preparations for the Nekowiar are exhaustive. Three complex dances are practised, and beauty magic takes over. Men, women, boys and girls use powders mixed with coconut oil to colour their faces a deep red, with black and yellow stripes.

Finally, as many as 2000 people assemble while the hosts display around 100 live, squealing pigs, tied by the feet and suspended on poles.

The ceremony begins with the host village's young men dancing an invitation to the women. They respond with the Napen-Napen, a spectacular dance that represents their toil in the fields, and continues throughout the first night.

The male guests watch and wait for dawn, when they dance the Toka, a pounding, colourful dance that shows scenes of daily life. The Toka reaches its climax that night. If the Toka dancers make a circle around a woman, she's tossed up and down between them. During this stage a man may have sex with any woman who is willing.

On the third day the chief of the host village produces the Kweriya, a 3m bamboo pole with white and black feathers wound around it and hawk's feathers on top. It announces that the Nao – the host village's dance – is to begin. The men's dance enacts events such as hunting and wrestling.

The climax is in the afternoon. Pigs, kava roots, woven mats, grass skirts and massive quantities of *laplap* are brought out. The pigs are ceremonially clubbed and cooked, and a huge feast begins.

If you get a chance to attend, go for it. You may need to camp out, like the villagers. It costs 6000Vt to watch, plus 10,000Vt to video it.

THE GENTLE DUGONG

Bondas' fat little snout swishes around on the ocean floor, sending up a cloud of fine sand as he separates out his food. Then he rolls over to get a better look at you and floats up to have his tummy rubbed. The experience is extraordinary – you realise in one mind-blowing moment what conservation is all about.

Dugongs inhabit the warm tropical and subtropical coastal waters of the Indian and south-west Pacific Oceans. But, worldwide, populations of these sweet creatures are declining due to overhunting, drowning in fishing nets, pollution and loss of food resources. In fact, dugong are considered vulnerable to extinction. Fortunately, by being cute and cuddly, they've turned themselves into a major tourist attraction. Hopefully, this will help protect them.

Activities

Horses and guides are available at **Lenakel Cove Resort** (☎ 68860, 23759; Lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu; village/banyan tour 2000/3500Vt); jungle trails take you past villages to a **giant banyan** as big as a soccer field. It's near Lowrapik Tuan.

Sea kayaks are available at several resorts. Guided walks take you through rainforest and coffee plantations, among the wild horses, along stunning coastlines and under two grand waterfalls. And there's a two-day trek around the top of Tanna.

There's excellent **snorkelling** right along the west coast, with the reef face cascading down for 100m. **Surfing** at the black-sand beach north of Louniel is fun. Boogie boards are available, or try riding the local outrigger canoes – that'll test your balance.

North Tanna Blue Hole Cave is a fishing-boat trip away. Duck-dive and come up in a stunning grotto, where the turquoise water is lit from a hole in the cave roof.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation on the west enjoys 24-hour electricity. In the east, it's generally available till 9pm. These are a few of the excellent options.

Tanna Evergreen Bungalows (☎/fax 68846, ☎ 68774; tevergreen@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 9; budget s/d 3500/5500Vt, garden s/d/tr/q 4500/6500/8000/9000Vt, camping 1000Vt; ☎) These bungalows hide coolly in the lush forest. Some have en suites, others ocean views (500Vt extra). Snorkel gear, baby-sitting, laundry, massage, glass-bottomed kayaks, a full range of tours – it's all here. Rates include breakfast; transfers are 200Vt. Visa, MasterCard and travellers cheques are accepted.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Leneai Palms Resort (☎ 68750; leneaipalms@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 106; ☎) An amazing spot, down on the bay, where grand bungalows with lounging rooms and shuttered windows open onto sea views. There are expansive lawns and homemade ice cream – all great, especially for families. The coast is dotted with protected rock pools, so snorkelling is fun. Snorkel gear and board games are available, or you can get a volleyball game happening and then enjoy a cold drink at the spacious bar.

White Grass Ocean Resort (☎ 68688; fax 68677; www.whitegrassvanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 5; s/d/tr incl breakfast 13,000/19,000/22,500Vt; ☎) A cosy resort where bungalows look out onto tiny rocky inlets, linked with timber bridges. There's a bar, tennis, *pétanque*, and a three-hole golf course. Snorkel gear, mountain bikes, kayaks and golf clubs are available. Rates include transfers. Visa, MasterCard and Amex are accepted.

Tanna White Beach Bungalows (☎ 68866; tanna_whitebeachbungalow@yahoo.com; PO Box 83; s/d incl breakfast 2875/4600Vt) A rambling track through the forest opens suddenly onto an inviting clearing around a huge shade tree. This fabulous place is owned and run by the local villagers (ask for Erick). Here you'll find a big traditional dining room, sparkly new bungalows and modern bathrooms. There's a white-sand beach with a rock pool. Snorkel the drop-off (bring your own gear), borrow the canoes, lounge under the trees – you'll never want to leave.

Silimaui Restaurant (meals 300Vt; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) This place hides prettily under vines as you turn into Isangel Rd. Dorah prepares a different dish each day and closes when it has all sold. If you're in luck, she'll be serving her fish in coconut cream with pawpaw and rice.

Other options:

Evergreen Restaurant & Bar (☎ 68774; mains 1000-1800Vt; ☎ 6am-10pm) At Tanna Evergreen Bungalows; serves great meals on a wide deck.

White Grass Restaurant & Bar (☎ 68688; meals 800-2500Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) At White Grass Ocean Resort, this is a great place to eat, overlooking rock pools, reef and ocean – a spread of light and colour at sunset.

EAST TANNA Sulphur Bay

This **Jon Frum Village** (admission 500Vt), built around a square ceremonial ground, used to be the cult's major centre (see opposite). The church to one side houses the movement's most sacred red cross. Beside it, an unpainted post dedicated to Christ is used to heal backaches. Ask for permission to use the hot spring on the black-sand beach: it's hydrotherapy, jumping out of the spring into the surf.

Dances are held on the ceremonial ground on Friday nights, when songs of praise are sung to the tunes of American battle hymns.

THE JON FRUM MOVEMENT

Magic is a central force in ni-Vanuatu lives. So in 1936, when Jon Frum came from the sea at Green Point and announced himself to some kava drinkers, they could see that he was the brother of the god of Mt Tukosmera. He told the men that if the Europeans left Tanna, there would be an abundance of wealth. They spread the word. It was the beginning of a neo-pagan uprising, with followers going back to their traditional dancing and kava drinking – but not cannibalism, fortunately.

When US troops arrived a few years later, many Tannese went to Efate and Santo to work for them. There they met African-American soldiers, who were colourful, with theatrical uniforms, decorations, badges, belts and hats. The African-Americans had huge quantities of transport equipment, refrigerators, radios, and endless supplies of Coca-Cola and cigarettes. But most of all, they were generous and friendly, treating the ni-Vans as equals. Here was the wealth and way of life the ni-Vans had been told about – Jon Frum must be American, they thought.

Some supporters made radio aerials out of tin cans and wire to contact Jon Frum. Others built an airfield in the bush and constructed wooden aircraft to entice his cargo planes to land. Still others erected wharves where his ships could berth. Small red crosses were placed all over Tanna and remain a feature in Jon Frum villages, where flags are raised each evening to this god of their collective imagination.

Port Resolution

Tanna's best anchorage is this beautiful bay with its magnificent cliffs. The village, **Yakuveran**, has pretty bungalows and a market with handicrafts, fruit and vegetables. Wide flower-lined paths lead to the beach: one comes out near the bay at Yewao Point to a **marine sanctuary**. The water is calm just before the coral reef finishes, offering excellent snorkelling.

Another path reaches an attractive **white-sand beach** at Irepuuwo.

The last path brings you to a top **surf beach**, with deep swells along 2.5km to Yankaren Para. Just make sure your board travels on the same plane you do.

Sights & Activities

Mt Yasur volcano dominates the landscape as you travel east across the ash plains. There are many tours up to see the old man, but there are many other extraordinary things to see as well.

Horses are available at Jungle Oasis (right). Head across the ash plains, up the volcano, and down to Port Resolution and Sharks Bay. Alternatively, you can board-ride down Yasur's ash plains. It's a quick trip down after a long walk up.

Cultural concerts are held in a clearing near Tapau, where narrow paths lead to magical fire-walking, animal traps, luminous mushrooms and handicrafts. String bands play and little kids sing and dance on a small stage.

The impressive **Imayo Waterfall** lies deep in the rainforest. The trek takes three hours each way – for experienced bushwalkers. Ask your host about guides.

Sharks Bay attracts dozens of yellow reef sharks. Stand on the cliff top to watch them (admission 500Vt), then walk a way along the stunning coastline.

Sleeping & Eating

Tropical Retreat Guesthouse (☎ 68899, 68000; PO Box 85; adventure@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d incl breakfast & dinner 1700/2300Vt) This is a peaceful spot, even with old Yasur roaring. Spacious bungalows are set in an unusual, meandering garden.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Jungle Oasis (☎ 68676; PO Box 858; garden bungalows s/d 2800/3500Vt, master bungalows s/d/f 3500/5000/6200Vt, camping 750Vt) Near the volcano entrance, these bungalows are in a romantic botanical garden with Yasur thundering in the background. Kelson's family are guides and baby-sitters, and they'll teach you how to catch wild chickens. Rates include breakfast. Transfers for a group are 2000Vt each. The dining room (set lunch/dinner 750/1200Vt) is tiny, but a vocal group will squeeze in if you'd like live music; an island feast with dancing under an immense *banyan* can be arranged on Thursday, for more than five people.

There's a flush toilet and a shower, and a nearby cave has turned into a natural sauna (250Vt). Ask for Philip Joel.

Port Resolution Yacht Club (☎ 68791, 68061; fax 68676; werry_narua@yahoo.com.au; PO Box 877; s/d/tr incl breakfast 3200/4800/5300Vt, camping 1500Vt) Set on a cliff top, each bungalow has a marvellous view of rugged Mt Melen. There's electricity in the evenings, a warm shower and a flush toilet. The dining room (meals are 500Vt to 1200Vt) has cold drinks – even beer. Transfers cost 3100/5700Vt for one/two people.

Turtle Bay Inn (Relais Baie de Tortues; ☎ 68850; fax 68885; info@vanuatu-paradise.com; PO Box 873; s/d incl breakfast & lunch 6850/11,200Vt, camping 1000Vt) This very French place (with electricity) is the absolutely perfect location if you want

seclusion alongside island-style luxury. Walk from the spacious bungalows directly through to the coral beach – there's surf behind the reef – or lounge to your heart's content in a soothing hot-water spring. Visa, MasterCard and Amex are all accepted.

Boita's Camping Ground (☎ 68676, 68000; s incl all meals 1000Vt) Bring your own tent, or stay in a bamboo-and-palm-frond *kastom* tent. Whichever, it's a glorious way to camp, moulded into the jungle. A tiny clearing with a pipe from a spring is your natural bathroom.

Ianiua Surf Beach Restaurant (☎ 68061; Port Resolution; 3-course buffet meal 650Vt; ☎ by arrangement) This gorgeous beach has the sweetest

little bamboo restaurant, where Chef Lea attends a ground oven. The aromas as she opens it up are yum. Choose from a laden table of tasty dishes using local produce, fresh herbs, flair and finesse. Order lobster in advance and the lads will go diving for them (extra 600Vt).

Vulcain Restaurant (☎ 68850; set 3-course meals 1800Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) Located at Turtle Bay Inn, Vulcain serves French and local cuisine.

MALEKULA

pop 25,000 / area 2023 sq km

Shaped like a sitting dog, Malekula has two highland areas connected by 'the dog's neck'. The uplands are extremely rugged and inhospitable, rising to over 800m and crisscrossed by narrow valleys.

Two of Malekula's major cultural groups are the Big Nambas and Small Nambas, named because of the size of the men's *namba* (penis sheath). Small Nambas men wear only one leaf of dried fibre wound around their penis and tucked into their bark belt. Their semi-*kastom* communities are built around a central dance area with up to five *tamtam*.

Big Nambas men wind large purple pandanus fibres around their penis, securing the loose ends in a thick bark belt and leaving the testicles exposed. They had such an awesome warlike reputation that no foreigner dared venture into their territory. Even police expeditions, which came to punish them for killing traders, were ambushed and dispersed. They kept a stone fireplace where unwelcome outsiders were ritually cooked and eaten. You can see cannibal sites at Unmet and near Sanwir.

Big Nambas *erpnave* (grade-taking) ceremonies are preceded by lengthy re hearsals. The men cover themselves in charcoal and coconut oil, tie nut rattles around their ankles and wear feathers in their hair. At the highest level, a man has the powerful characteristics of a hawk, and a hawk dance is performed by a spirit man. The outfit, the movement and the spirit are stunning and unforgettable.

There's no malaria in Malekula's mountainous central region, whereas the coast is infested with it.

Information

There are no ATMs and all places accept only cash. The NBV bank in Lakatoro will change travellers cheques and Australian dollars, but you can't access cash through your accounts, so take heaps of Vatu.

The **tourism officer** (☎ 48491; malpc@vanuatu.com.vu) is based at the council offices and can help with any aspect of tourism in the province. There's a **hospital** (☎ 48410) at Norsup, on the northeast coast.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

At least twice a day **Vanair** (☎ 25025) lands at Norsup on the Vila/Luganville route. Three times a week flights also stop at Lamap. Planes fly to South West Bay when required. A twice-weekly loop links Norsup with Ambrym, Paama and Epi.

For boats that call into Malekula, see p809. A chartered speedboat ride from Wala in northern Malekula to Luganville in Santo costs around 18,000Vt.

GETTING AROUND

Roads run from Norsup around the north coast and down the east coast to Lamap. The roads are rough and rutted and ford many river beds, so in the wet season they are often closed.

It costs 300/100Vt by taxi/minibus from Norsup airport into Lakatoro, but at week-ends there aren't many around. Boats often arrive at Litslits in the early evening, and a taxi then is also unlikely, so try to hitch if you see a vehicle. Otherwise you may have to walk, which is not easy in the dark.

A **truck** (☎ 48594) operates along the east coast between Lakatoro and Lamap (1000Vt) on week days, leaving Lamap at 5am and returning from Lakatoro at 1pm. At weekends you need to charter the truck (16,000Vt). Trucks/taxis run more frequently between Lakatoro and Veturah in the north (200/900Vt).

Most public transport leaves Lakatoro from the **MDC General Store** (☎ 48443). For details, see p787.

All inhabited islands are linked to the mainland by speedboats or canoes. You can get to Uripiv and Uri (see p787) by canoe or speedboat from the Lakatoro jetty. There are plenty of canoes going across between 4pm and 4.30pm, when it costs 100Vt for

SOME OTHER SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Mystery Island

'Welcome to Paradise', the pilot will say as you clamber out of his tiny plane onto Aneityum's grass airstrip on Mystery Island. And it's true: this beautiful sandy islet is surrounded by a broad sand bank and dazzling coral in an azure sea, just like in the movies. Garden paths crisscross the island, many leading to little thatched loos. **Snorkelling** is fantastic off the end of the airstrip, as the island is a marine sanctuary. Aneityum people believe Mystery Island is the home of ghosts, so no-one will live there.

Cross to **Anelcauhut**, Aneityum's main village, to see fascinating ruins of whaling-industry equipment, missionary Geddies' church and old irrigation channels. Take stunning walks from Anelcauhut to picturesque **Port Patrick**, impressive **Inwan Leleghei Waterfall** or to the top of **Inerow Atahein** (853m), an extinct volcano.

Mystery Island Guesthouse (☎ 68896, 68672; beds 2250Vt) has three bedrooms and a kitchen. Someone will come over from Aneityum each day to bring supplies, but it's a good idea to bring extras. Except on cruise-ship days (about every six weeks), you'll probably have this paradise to yourself – actually, you can book the whole island for 6750Vt, just to make sure!

Erromango

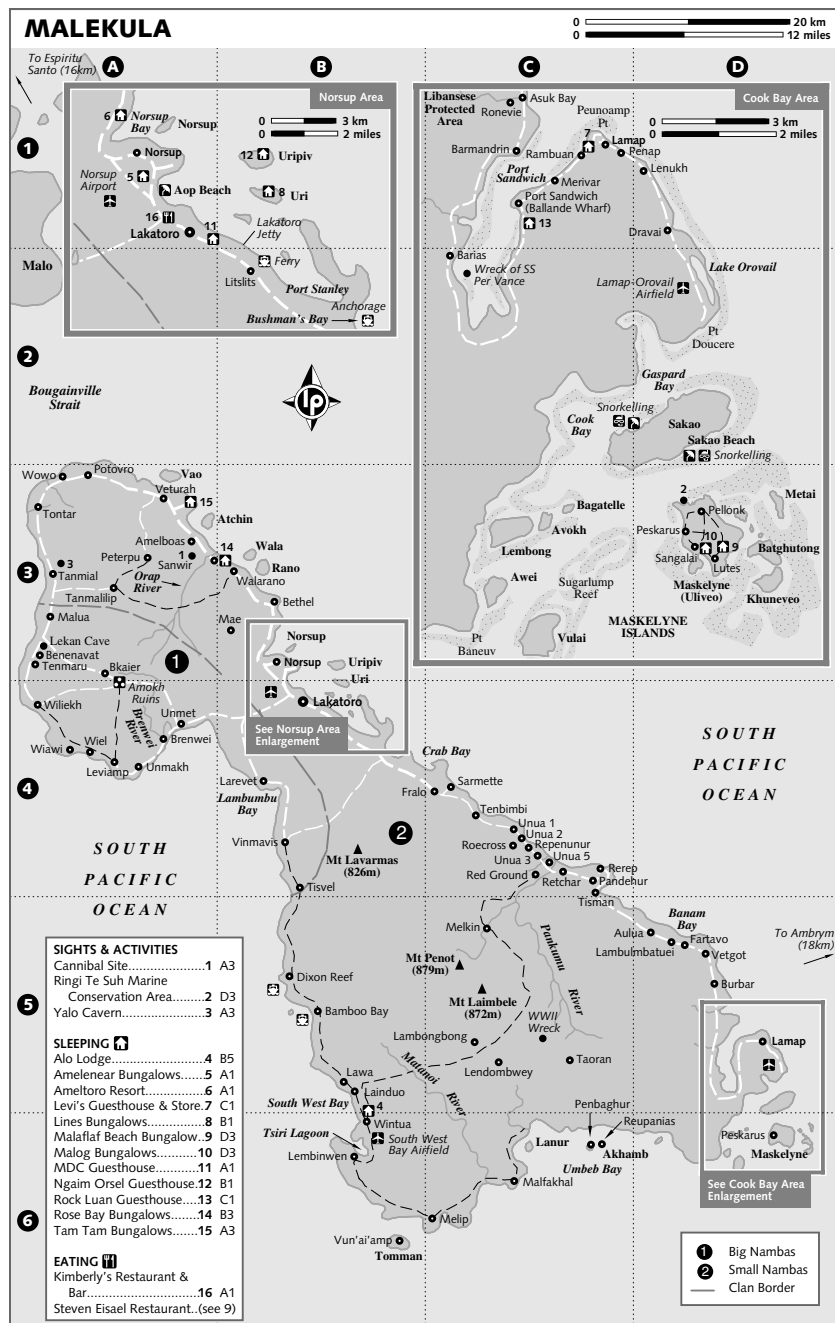
The 'land of mangoes' is mountainous, with almost all the people living in two main villages on its rugged coast. Each village has a fertile eco-garden, where taro, tomato, corn and sweet potato thrive among huge mango, coconut and pawpaw trees.

Dillons Bay is Erromango's largest settlement, with a huge crystal-clear **swimming hole** formed by the Williams River as it turns to the sea. Sandalwood trees still grow in the rainforest and a rock shows the outline of Williams, the first missionary here. They laid his short, stout body on this rock and chipped around it prior to cooking it.

Guided walks from Dillons Bay include trips to the **kauri reserve**, to see the ancient 40m-high trees, and a three-day walk down south and across to Ipota. There's magnificent scenery as you drop in and out of deep, fjord-like valleys, pass taro gardens, carve through tropical rainforests and trek down a 300m-high escarpment to scenic **Pongkil Bay**. Then you follow the coastal cliffs to a final steep descent to **South River**, beside a picturesque estuary. Boulder-hop and ford South River as you follow it to the Ipota road.

A guide costs about 1500Vt per day, plus food.

At the mouth of the Williams River, **Meteson's Guesthouse** (☎ /fax 68792; islands@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d B&B 4200/5600Vt) has been extended to sleep 10. Chief William arranges tours, transport and guides. Meals are 350Vt.



a ride. Otherwise, a speedboat charter is 1500Vt. If you're staying on Uripiv, ask your host about borrowing a canoe for snorkelling, or to arrange permission to paddle across to Uri.

THE DOG'S HEAD Sights & Activities

Take your bloodthirsty self on a demanding half-day return walk to the Big Nambas **cannibal site** deep in the forest behind Sanwir – it's complete with a stone fireplace, stone tables where corpses were dismembered, and many bones.

The **two-day trek** across the rugged 'dog's head' takes you from Rose Bay Bungalows in Sanwir to Malua, on the west coast – return by transport. This trek has been documented by the Australian Heritage Foundation as it combines natural and cultural treasures with magnificent scenery, caves, waterfalls and *kastom* villages.

Tours go to Small Nambas **kastom dancing** on Rano, or at Amelboas; to Big Nambas dances at Unmet and Mae; and to the spectacular **Yalo Cavern** near Tanmial. Other tours go out to the islets of Wala and Vao.

Sleeping & Eating

Rose Bay Bungalows (☎ /fax 48602; rosebay@vanuatu.com.vu; B&B dm 2480Vt, s/d incl all meals 4000/8000Vt) A charming group of traditional bungalows with en suites, set in gardens on a small black-sand bay. The food is good, but bring your own drinks. Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

Tam Tam Bungalows (☎ 48926; Veturah; s/d 1500/3000Vt) Here the bungalows are linked by flower-lined paths around rock pools of coral. Owner Jean-Michel has bikes and snorkel gear; a speedboat and spear fishing can be arranged. There's power until 9pm, a store selling crafts, and a grand *nakamal* for drinking kava. Meals are 500Vt.

EASTERN MALEKULA

Norsup's commercial activities revolve around Plantations Réunies de Vanuatu (PRV), whose **coconut plantations** border the town. Just beyond the airport terminal is sandy **Aop Beach**, whose palms and turquoise water make it a pretty spot to wait for your plane. A long stretch of beautiful coral reef stretches southwards from Aop Beach to Litslits, the main port for this area.

Lakatoro

Set on two levels divided by a steep slope, this attractive place with many shady trees is Malampa province's administrative capital. On the top level are the **Council Offices** (☎ 48503) and the **Cultural Centre** (☎ 48651), which has fascinating exhibits and photos. On the bottom level, at the northern end of town, are the LTC Co-op, NBV bank, post office, bakery and Vanair office. Half-way along the bottom road is the charming **Seven Leven** (☎ 5-10pm). It's a kava bar and *nakamal* set out like a miniature resort, with soft music and an electric grinder for the kava. The southern end has the MDC General Store and market. Ask here about hiring fishing boats or taking a boat out to Uripiv and Uri islands.

Lakatoro has mains electricity.

Sleeping & Eating

Amelnear Bungalows (☎ 48773, 53962; Norsup; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) New bungalows with en suites just at the end of the airstrip. Sit on the porch and look across the ocean to Lakatoro, or walk along to attractive Aop Beach – the best place to swim. Tours from here include a trip to see the giant clams and *kastom* dances at Uri Island.

Ameltoro Resort (☎ 42724; Norsup; B&B per person 3000Vt) Cute egg-shaped bungalows, sparkly new, each with a pretty en suite. They're in a peaceful garden, right on the water – you can look across to Norsup and Norsup Island. A the restaurant (set meals 350Vt; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner Monday to Friday), Rona blends flavours to bring the best of French influence to island foods in a lovely tropical atmosphere.

MDC Guesthouse (☎ /fax 48445; Lakatoro; r with fan/air-con 2500/5000Vt; ☎) At the southern end of town, this is actually a motel (two storeys!) with spacious rooms and shared kitchen and facilities. Davina will look after you very well.

Kimberly's Restaurant & Bar (☎ 54312; Lakatoro; meals 200-350Vt; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat) A cute place with colourful tablecloths and resident geckoes for luck. The drinks are cold and Kimberly's cooking is excellent.

Uripiv & Uri

Both these islands have a **marine reserve** proclaimed by the chief. The sanctuary at Uri is designed to protect the mangroves and reef,

and there's the rare opportunity to see colourful giant clams. The reserves have everything for the snorkeller – beautiful coral, small colourful fish, and turtles.

Ngaim Orsel Guesthouse (☎ 48564; Uripiv; PO Box 62; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) This very friendly place is set in the middle of an old *nat-saro* (dance area) filled with exotic plants. There's a bungalow, a library and a quaint house with three bedrooms, kitchen, lounge and electricity when needed. Kalki will arrange trips to the marine reserve (600Vt for canoe, guide and fees) or an island feast with a string band (300Vt) for a group.

Lines Bungalows (☎ 48939; Uri; s incl all meals 1500Vt) On your own beach on Uri, you have two bungalows to choose between, outside loo and shower, and tank water for drinking. Walk around to Uri village, but ask permission from the chief before entering the village. Bring snorkel gear to see the giant clams in the marine reserve.

THE SOUTHEAST COAST

Pankumu River is Vanuatu's longest watercourse outside Santo. The river has repeatedly changed course, leaving a large wetland of oxbows and bayous. It is a great spot for bird-watching. The chestnut-bellied kingfisher is widely distributed on the island, as is the emerald dove or *sot leg* (in Bislama).

Libanese Protected Area

This **forest and beach area** at Asuk Bay is totally beautiful, with a backdrop of mountains and a wide crystal-clear river overhanging with tropical trees and vines. Take a great **half-day tour** (☎ 48594; admission 1000Vt) that starts with a greeting in **Ronevie**, and then continues with

a canoe trip up the river. Dive in the clear waters to see eels and fish, bushwalk, and have lunch with the villagers. Afterwards, you can snorkel in the **marine sanctuary** (admission 200Vt). In Asuk Bay, speak to Bongman James or Chief Philip Dalley (☎ 48594).

Port Sandwich

Malekula's safest **anchorage** was named after the Earl of Sandwich, a British prime minister, and is favoured by touring yachts. At the wharf, a small golden beach may tempt you in for a swim. Don't do it! Don't even paddle. This is the worst place for shark attacks.

Rock Luan Guesthouse (☎ 48663; beds 1500Vt), overlooking the bay, is big and beautiful, with several bedrooms around a large sitting area. Rock is an expert on all things local and will entertain you with great stories over a cold beer.

Lamap

Lamap is where you organise taxis and speedboats. The truck for Lakatoro (1000Vt) leaves each weekday at 5am. Ask at the store attached to Levi's Guesthouse.

The **Roman Catholic mission** is a large, modern church with interesting wall paintings modelled on traditional sand-drawing designs (see p762). A three-day **art festival** rotates around the area every two years. A celebration of local culture, song and *kastom* dances, it will next be in Lamap in 2008. Contact the **Area Council Secretary** (☎ 48470) or the **Provincial Tourism Officer** (malpc@vanuatu.com.vu) for details.

Behind Levi's store, the very basic **Levi's Guesthouse** (☎ 48663; beds 1500Vt) has six beds in three rooms, and a large kitchen. There's

electricity in the evening. One-way transfers from Lamap airfield are 500Vt.

THE MASKELYNES

The road from Lamap ends at a sandy beach, **Point Doucere**, where canoes and speedboats head out to the Maskelynnes. It's a 20-minute walk from the airport through coconut plantations.

The Maskelynnes are just gorgeous. Most islands have coral reefs with excellent **diving** and **snorkelling**, especially at Sakao Beach. But be very careful of strong currents between the islands. Some of the islands are very rugged; others have patches of mangrove-lined coast, or sandy beaches. The main island, **Maskelyne (Ulivo)**, is a friendly, busy place; watch the villagers make canoes, weave, string necklaces and planters, and hunt for edible sea creatures when the tide is out.

Take a tour to **Ringi Te Suh Marine Conservation Area**, a 100-hectare protected reef where you can snorkel over the beautiful giant clams and picnic on a manmade island.

A **Mangrove Discovery Tour** will teach you about this ecologically rich resource.

Sleeping & Eating

Malog Bungalows (☎ 48930, 48519; islands@vanuatu.com.vu; Peskarus; s/d incl breakfast 2750/5000Vt; camping 500Vt) Has three all-traditional rooms on the shore between the mangroves. Go in an outrigger to an excellent reef for beginners' snorkelling; it's shallow, clear, still and pretty. The restaurant (meals 400Vt to 1900Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is in a tropical pagoda, and Nina's menu includes lobster just caught that morning.

Malafaf Beach Bungalow (☎ 48458; Lutes; s/d incl all meals 3000/4000Vt) This new two-bedroom bungalow has its own sandy beach on a crystal-clear lagoon with a coral reef. Further along is the cookhouse, where your host creates interesting meals that you can eat right on the beach while watching the sunset.

Steven Eisael Restaurant (mains 900-2700Vt) Out on the point at Lutes, this great little place sits over the water, so enjoy the view while you enjoy your fish and chips, or lobster extravaganza.

Getting There & Around

Trucks run from Lamap or its airport to Point Doucere (1500Vt), from where it's

a pleasant boat trip across to Peskarus (2500Vt). On arrival, your boatman will introduce you to a member of the council, who'll show you around.

SOUTH WEST BAY

The ancient traditions of the Small Nambas people are well preserved in south-western Malekula. *Nakamal* and dancing grounds are being opened to tourists, and grade-taking is on the increase.

Wintua

This village looks out over South West Bay from behind forested hills. You can do a day walk into the hills to three mainly *kastom* villages (5000Vt for a *kastom* dance). There's safe **swimming** off the western end of the airstrip, and a canoe trip to the **fish nursery** at Tsiri Lagoon is available. A three-hour **waterfall walk** takes you through rainforest to a deep plunge pool, the home of large eels.

Alo Lodge (☎ /fax 48659; B&B s/d 4300/5800Vt), near the airport, has four bedrooms, and a veranda covered in grand artwork. Owner George Thompson arranges transport, guides, deep-sea fishing and tours out of Wintua.

There are Vanair flights to South West Bay if the airfield is not under water.

AMBRYM

pop 13,500 / area 680 sq km

Ambrym (also called the Black Island because of its dark soils) has amazing twin volcanoes, Mt Marum and Mt Benbow, which magnificently spew ash and gases, and keep vulcanologists all over the world on the alert.

Magic in Vanuatu is strongest on the islands with active volcanoes, and Ambrym is considered the country's sorcery centre. Sorcerers (*man blong majik* or *man blong posen*) are feared and despised. Many ni-Vans have seen too many unexplained happenings and would treat anyone who was found practicing black magic severely. Magic for tourists is not considered black.

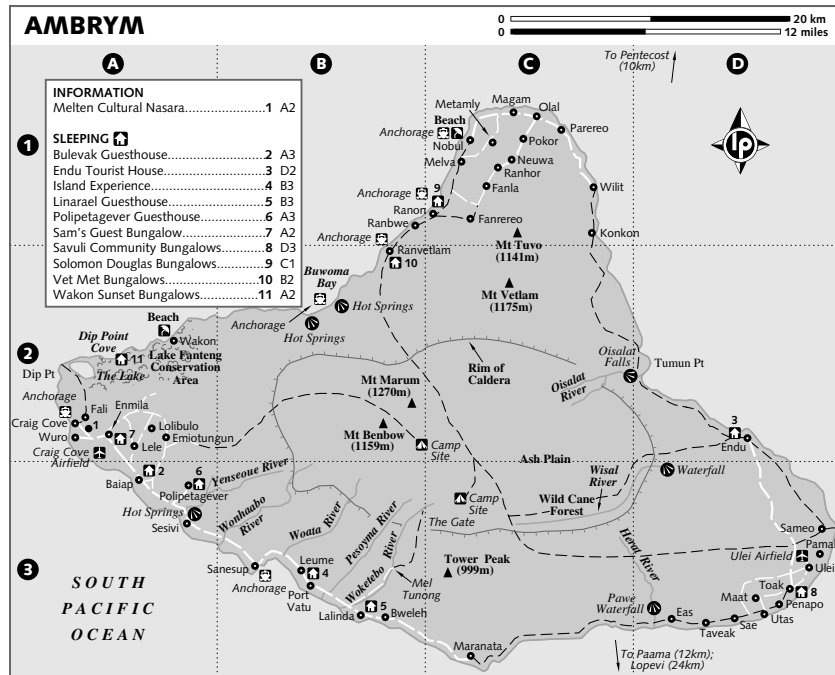
Ambrym is also the island for sand drawings, with 180 sand designs, each referring to a specific object, legend, dance or creature.

The **Back to My Roots Festival** is a week of celebrations in August each year; an extravaganza of cultural demonstrations and

THE MANBUSH WALK

A fantastic walk starts from the bush track, heading inland from the road, about 200m north of the Pankumu River at **Retchar**. First ask at Unua 3 for Elijah. He can arrange your homestay in Melkin, his family village. Drive up to Red Ground, behind Unua 5, then it's a 10km, two-hour walk along the Pankumu as it narrows into winding channels, isolated pools and a series of minor cascades. **Melkin** has the head *nakamal* for the Small Nambas, but you can't look at it. There are dancing grounds, *tamtams*, drums and stone carvings. It's *kastom*, right in the centre of Manbush (a southern *kastom* area). Everyone also attends bible studies twice a day.

The walk continues next day with a seriously gruelling six-hour climb to **Lambongbong**, an old trading centre where you could exchange goods for pigs. Up here, villagers still make fire by rubbing sticks together. It's so beautiful that it's seriously worth the agony. Then there's an easier six-hour walk over mountains and past waterfalls to **South West Bay**, where you can fly to Lamap or go north by boat.



ceremonies, fashion shows, Rom dances, magic, and cooking lessons. Accommodation (1500Vt) is organised for tourists, crafts are for sale, stalls are heaped with food, and there are tour guides and explanations of dances. For details, check with the **Vanuatu Cultural Centre** (☎ 22129; vks@vanuatu.com.vu) in Port Vila or with **Sowany Merani** (☎ 48631).

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Vanair (☎ 25025) calls in to both of Ambrym's airports (Craig Cove and Ulei) on flights out of both Vila and Luganville twice a week on Tuesday and Saturday.

Some tour companies in Vila offer volcano adventure flights to Ambrym. For boats that call into Ambrym, see p809.

The best anchorages are at Craig Cove and Sanesup in the south (Port Vatu is OK in good weather), and Buwoma Bay, Ranvetlam, Ranon and Nobul in the north.

You can travel from northern Ambrym to southwestern Pentecost by speedboat (9000Vt).

GETTING AROUND

Some 4WD trucks grind their way along the rutted road that connects Craig Cove with Maranata in the south. Others go from Ulei to Endu on the east coast. There are roads around the northern tip but no trucks.

Speedboats travel between Craig Cove and Ranvetlam (12,000Vt one way). Ask your bungalow host to arrange transport and guides.

VOLCANOES

The dark, brooding outlines of Mt Benbow and Mt Marum are 1km or so apart. Usually shrouded in smoke and cloud, they dominate the vast, grey ash plain that lies within the old caldera. At night, the sky above them glows red.

White smoke pours from Mt Benbow's vents, but it dumped half its side in on itself, plugging up its central crater, in 2005. It's not certain how long it will be before it blows the plug. You can look over the smoky gullet of Mt Marum and see the red-hot magma boiling way below. She's been spewing molten rock and dense black smoke from her vents.

THE ROM DANCE

Ambrym's most striking traditional ceremony, the Rom dance, combines *maghe* (grade-taking) elements with magic. The dancers first perform in their home village, then visit other villages to put on shows, wearing the extraordinary Rom costume: a tall, conical, brightly painted banana-fibre mask and a thick cloak of banana leaves.

It's *tabu* to see a Rom costume being made. Only men who have paid for the right to enter the *nasara* (chief's private area) may be involved; certainly not women or tourists. Anyone who disobeyed this taboo would be fined a pig and have their backs whipped with *nanggalat* (a native plant) – it burns your skin for days – or wild cane. Wild cane also marks the entrance to the taboo area. Be careful!

Both volcanoes are being closely monitored and evacuation plans are ready.

To go up you have to be fit and used to walking on steep terrain, and you need a good guide to hack your way through jungle, cross glassy strips of old lava, push through wild bamboo forest and trudge along steamy gorges. And when you reach the caldera the hard work starts.

There's no shade, just wave after wave of barren grey ridges. Skin protection and plenty of drinking water are essential. The slopes around both volcanoes are covered with a dry slippery crust, so your boots need to be strong enough to kick toe holes. Ankle support is also necessary as there's some boulder hopping. Between the mountains, the walk over the razor-backed ridge gets very narrow and snakes nastily upwards, and vents all around spurt smelly smoke. Mother Nature does her best to be daunting.

Access Points

The best idea is to go up one way and down another (different guides will meet you on the caldera). Trek prices depend on variables such as the distance travelled by truck, local fees, whether you stay overnight and number of guides, but they start from about 6000/9500Vt north/south. The sacred custom of the north is that there's no fishing, hunting or other activities from

September to January – the yam-planting season. Volcano trips are available from the south only during these months.

The four access points:

Emiotungun Truck it to the road's end, then it's a fun six-hour walk along sand cliffs with no major slopes. If you come back this way, go direct with the truck to the hot pools at Baiap.

Lalinda The slopes are fierce, but this way is the quick est: a truck trip, then a three-hour slog from the end of the road. The sudden break from forest to ash plain is stunningly beautiful. Lalinda is home to Jimmy Penuel, a fantastic, authoritative guide.

Ranvetlam A complete experience – six-hours of jungle, views, ash plain – and not too excruciating. Many tours continue southwest from the volcanoes to Craig Cove.

Ulei A four-hour trek to the ash plain, across Wisal River, and return through a wild cane forest, down to Endu (five hours) and back along black-sand beaches and pools.

Volcano Tours

Your tour guides usually have gear (tents, sleeping bags, hard hats, gloves, gas masks) available should you want to hire anything. Trips out of Craig Cove go via Lalinda or Emiotungun. Guides:

Apia (☎ 48450) Arranges truck and trek tours out of Ulei.

Isaiah Bong (☎ 48405) Takes an overnight walk from Ranvetlam down to Craig Cove, climbing both volcanoes (tents and food provided).

Ramel Bong (☎ 48620) Takes 12-hour day trips by truck and trek from Craig Cove to Mt Marum. BYO food.

Solomon Douglas (☎ 48405) Takes an eight-hour trek from Ranvetlam to either one of the volcanoes.

WEST AMBRYM

Ambrym's commercial centre, Craig Cove, has a guesthouse, an NBV bank, and a co-op that sells fresh bread, canned food, alcohol and hardware.

Sights & Activities

Volcano tours run out of Craig Cove, Emiotungun and Polipetagever. A 10-minute walk from Craig Cove airport, **Melten Cultural Nasara** (admission 2000Vt) makes a grand introduction to Ambrym's adventures.

Based in Polipetagever, **West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours** Vila (☎ 26160; jpong@vu.peacecorps.gov); Ambrym (☎ 48620) offers fabulous one-/two-day tours. You can visit hot springs, canoe to isolated villages, sleep under the stars or camp on beautiful beaches. Tours include transfers, transport, accommodation, meals, tour guides, entrance fees

and camping gear (from single/family 10,000/19,000Vt). Ask for James Bong in Vila, Sam in Ambrym.

Villagers at Lolibulo perform the **Rom dance** (admission 4500Vt). Emiotungun has lovely old **carvings** in the *nasara*, **Rom dancing** (admission 5000Vt), **magic shows** (admission 800Vt), **sand drawings** (admission 1000Vt) and **string band concerts** (admission 1000Vt).

Lake Fanteng Conservation Area (admission 500Vt) at Dip Point is a beautiful spot, with many wild ducks and 30 bird species.

Sleeping

Polipetagever Guesthouse (☎ 48991, 48994, 48852; jbond@vu.peacecorps.gov; Polipetagever; s/d incl all meals 1500/3000Vt) Accommodation here is free if you are taking one of the West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours (see p791). The quaint guesthouse is built from forest timber that has been planed smooth with axes and tied with vines. If you are staying on the way to the volcano, transfers to the airport/volcano road end are 3000/2500Vt return.

Bulevak Guesthouse (☎ 48567, 48955; Baiap; s incl all meals 1500Vt) This is the swishest place in Baiap, with louvre windows, cement floors and comfortable beds. It's also closest to the hot springs. Return transfers to the Craig Cove airfield 3000Vt.

Sam's Guest Bungalow (☎ 48620, 48575; Enmila; s/d incl all meals 1600/3200Vt) A small bungalow in Sam's family compound with a cook house, shared water-seal toilet and bathroom, where you tip water over yourself. Sam and his family are great company – you'll find Sam at the airfield; he arranges tours and transport.

Wakon Sunset Bungalows (☎ 48547, 48991; www.positiveearth.org/bungalows/malampa/wakon.htm; s/d 1000/2000Vt, camping 1000Vt) On a long black-sand beach out at Dip Point, Chief Jessy's new bamboo bungalow has two bedrooms, a bush kitchen, and the ocean for washing. Be Robinson Crusoe, fish from the chief's canoe or bird-watch – Lake Fanteng Conservation Reserve is 10 minutes away. Meals are 200Vt, and a speedboat from Craig Cove is 1200Vt.

SOUTH AMBRYM Port Vatu

This interesting village is a good place to set out for the **volcanoes** (☎ 48996; guides 3000Vt). The trip takes four hours and the entry fee

isn't included in the price. A taxi is 7000Vt from Craig Cove.

John Tasso has two lovely bungalows at **Island Experience** (☎ 48679, 48996; s incl all meals 2500Vt). You can learn how to make local *kaekae* (food) and build your own house, starting with vines and *natangura* leaves – nestle into your own little mushroom.

Lalinda

The chief at Lalinda is the *kastom* owner of the southern access to the volcanoes (entry fee 1000Vt). Problem is, the village is divided by church affiliations. If you come by truck, take your driver's advice about where to go, but try to find Jimmy Penuel, a very professional guide. He's with the SDA faction, and they have built a new entry road that is quite superior.

Linarael Guesthouse (beds 1000Vt) sleeps six people and has a kitchen, toilet and wash-room; water is available nearby. The locals will cook dinner (500Vt), and there's a baker ready to bake for your journey!

EAST AMBRYM

Ulei has only recently opened as an entry point to the volcanoes. Near the airfield is Toak, a large village where locals will show you very traditional sand drawing, magic, *kastom* stories, dances, caves and waterfalls. Taxi can be hired here.

New and gorgeous **Savuli Community Bungalows** (☎ 48786; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt), made of stone, bamboo and thatch, is set along the black-sand beach – ask for Jeppy. The shared bathroom has a flush toilet and a shower. Transport from the airport is 600Vt.

Endu is a pretty village further north along the coast. The chief has a good truck for airport transfers. **Endu Tourist House** (☎ 48450; s incl meals 1500Vt) is in a garden and has a real shower. Ask for Apia. Tours from here include an extraordinary waterfall walk, and great Rom dances.

NORTH AMBRYM

Most of Ambrym's northern coast has high volcanic cliffs rising straight out of the sea. The **motorboat journey** from Craig Cove to Ranon (12,000Vt) is fantastic, chugging past sheer angled cliffs, *namaruh* forests, rock caves, turtles, dolphins and wild ducks. Stop at the hot springs for a swim on the way.

The best **Rom dances and magic** (admission 3000Vt) can be seen inland at Ranhor and Fanla. An **island feast** can be prepared for eight or more people.

Chief Joseph at Ranvetlam is the *kastom* owner of the northern approach to the volcanoes; the guides also live in this village.

Sleeping & Eating

Solomon Douglas Bungalows (☎ /fax 48405; Ranon; s/d incl all meals 4500/6700Vt) Charming and traditional; has a flush toilet and a hot-water shower. The bungalows are up a cliff from the bay, with stunning views. Owner Laan arranges tours, guides and Rom dances, and speedboats to Craig Cove and Pentecost.

Vet Met Bungalows (☎ /fax 48405, ☎ 48527, 48687; www.positiveearth.org/vetmet/; Ranvetlam; s/d incl all meals 5100/7200Vt) This place has brightly painted bungalows, a flush toilet, a hot shower and a lovely dining area. It's on a peaceful cliff where you can walk down to a rocky bay. Owner Isaiah Bong arranges volcano tours, provides tents and organises Rom dances at neighbouring villages.

A speedboat fare between Ranon and Ranvetlam is 3000Vt return.

ESPIRITU SANTO

pop 33,000 / area 3677 sq km

It's a top spot for diving, with its healthy reefs and the world's best wreck, as elegant as the *Titanic*, lying in clear, calm, warm water. It's a top spot for adventure, with Vanuatu's four highest peaks, a centre of

impenetrable jungle and extraordinary caves. It's a top spot for swimming, with white-sand beaches and azure water all up the east coast. Besides, the whole island's just gorgeous.

Santo is Vanuatu's largest island. Its fascinating history has been acted out predominantly on the southern and eastern coastal strips, where town-types live and the land is developed for cattle grazing and plantations. Inland a bit, the villages are isolated, and the villagers are totally self-sufficient, even dressing in clothes woven from the leaves of the jungle. As *kastom* demands, there are important *nimangki* ceremonies (see p760) throughout these villages.

Information

Consult the helpful website of the **Santo Rotary Club** (www.santotoday.com/). Dave Cross, president of the Espiritu Santo Tourism Association, will happily answer your queries. Dave can be found at the Beachfront Resort (p798).

Activities

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELLING

You shouldn't come to Santo without trying a dive. The coral's bright and healthy, the wrecks are world class, prices are fantastic and the dive operators are extremely professional. Snorkelling is also excellent. Look at www.aquamarinesanto.com to see some sites, such as Million Dollar Point; *MV Henry Bonneaud*, a haven for flashlight fish, making it one of the world's great night

FROM JUNGLE TO CITY TO DIVING MECCA

Second Channel was the Allies' base for their efforts against the Japanese advance during WWII. For three years to September 1945, more than half a million military personnel, mainly Americans, were stationed here waiting to head into battle in the Pacific. There were sometimes 100 ships moored off Luganville.

Roads were laid. There were 40 cinemas, four military hospitals, five airfields, a torpedo boat base, jetties and market gardens. Quonset huts were erected for use as offices, workshops and servicemen's accommodation; many still stand around Luganville. Over 10,000 ni-Vans came to work for the troops. To them, the servicemen seemed fabulously wealthy and generous.

Unfortunately, the USS *President Coolidge*, a luxury liner turned troop-ship carrier, hit a friendly mine during the war. It became the world's largest accessible and diveable shipwreck.

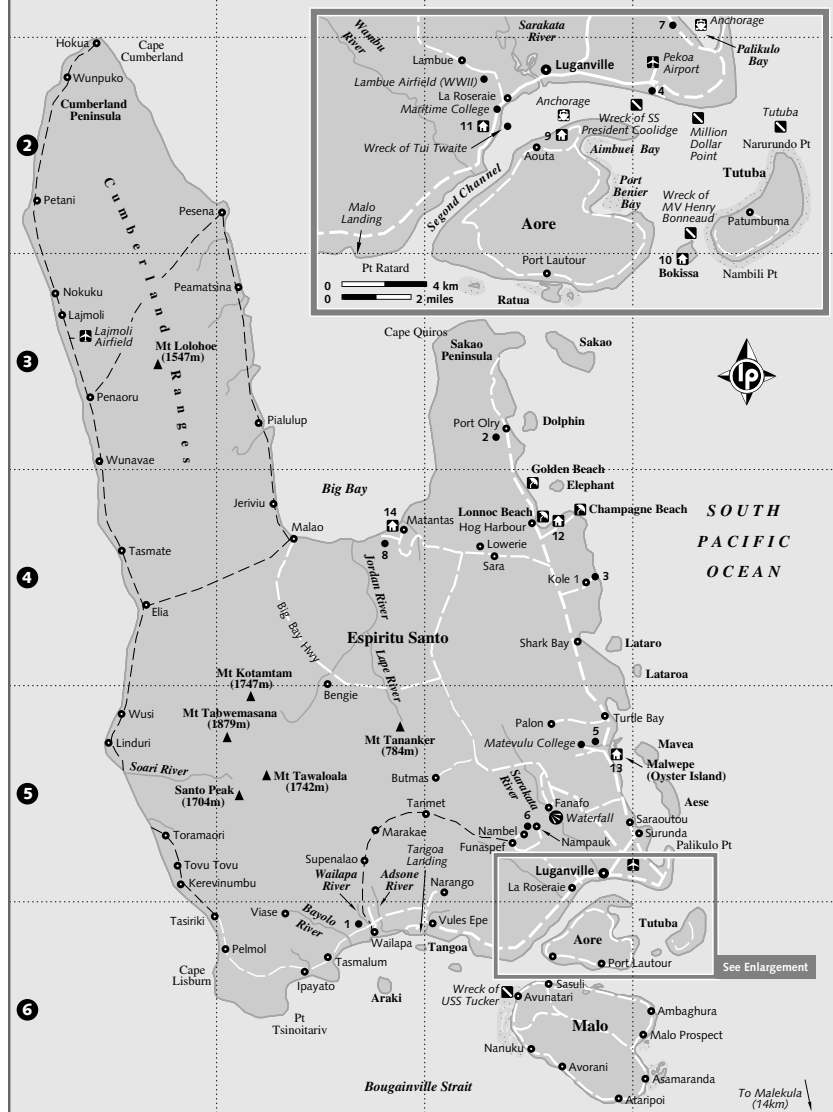
Once the fighting was over the USA offered the Condominium government the surplus war equipment, but they didn't respond, so the lot was dumped. Everything from bulldozers, aeroplane engines and jeeps to crates of Coca-Cola went into the sea at what is now Million Dollar Point. The coral-encrusted equipment makes the point a popular diving and snorkelling spot.

ESPIRITU SANTO

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bel Mol Plantation.....	1	B6
Little Paradise of Port Olyr.....	2	C3
Loru Conservation Area.....	3	C4
Lysepsep Culture Park.....	4	D2
Matevulu Blue Hole.....	5	C5
Millenium Cave.....	6	C5

Santo Golf Club.....	7	D1	Lonnoc Beach Bungalows.....	12	C4
Vatthe Conservation Area.....	8	B4	Oyster Island Resort.....	13	C5
			Vatthe Lodge.....	14	B4
SLEEPING 					
Aore Resort.....	9	C2	EATING		
Bokissa Eco Island Resort.....	10	D3	Corral Quays Resort.....	(see 11)	
Corral Quays Fish & Dive Resort.....	11	C2	Lonnoc Beach Bar & Restaurant.....	(see 12)	



dives; USS *President Coolidge*, lying in 21m to 67m of water; and Tutuba Point, a spectacular drift dive with brilliant corals and amazing marine life.

There are boat and offshore dives for beginners to gurus. A single shore/boat dive starts at 4000/6000Vt. The big three operators:

Allan Power Dive Tours (☎ 36822; www.allan-power-santo.com; Main St, Luganville) An old favourite.

Aquamarine (☎ 36196; www.aquamarinesanto.com; Luganville) On the water's edge, with a great deck to sit and study your notes.

Bokissa Island Dive (☎ 36913; www.bokissa.com)
At Bokissa Eco Island Resort. Especially for guests.

GAME & SPORT FISHING

A half-/full-day on the deep blue costs around 50,000/75,000Vt for a maximum of six people. The catch is tagged and returned, or donated to local villages – it's never wasted. The main operators are **Allan Power Dive Tours** (☎ 36822; www.allan-power-santo.com; Main St, Luganville) in *The Lady*, a 10m Reefmaster, and **Seascope Charters** (☎ 37379; islandflyer@vanuatu.com.vu) in *Island Flyer*, a 7.5m Shark Cat.

TREKKING

Favourite treks are through the Vathe Conservation Area (p800) and the Loru Conservation Area (p800). For die-hard trekkers there are major challenges in the Cumberland Ranges, such as the Santo Peak trek (p800).

A five-day **Southern Jungle Adventure** (☎ 54491; hotelsanto@vanuatu.com.vu; treks per day 6000Vt) takes you through rainforest, gardens, rivers, waterfalls and caves, including fabulous Millenium Cave. Spend your nights in traditional villages where Mal-Mal people (Pygmy size) live and still use stone-age equipment.

HORSE RIDING

Beginners and experienced riders can arrange horse-riding excursions through **Bel Mol Plantation** (☎ 36823; belmolbeef@Vanuatu.com.vu; half-/full-day 6000/12,000V). Clippity-clop amongst coconut trees, along the coast and up on the plateau, and round up some sleek Santo cattle.

GOLF

The **Santo Golf Club** (🚗 Sat & Sun) at Palikulo Bay welcomes visitors, but you need to

bring your own clubs. It's a delightful course running along the sea front with fine views of Aese Island and Palikulo Point. There's a golf tournament at the club on the last Sunday of every month.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are at least two return flights daily between Vila and Luganville's Pekoia airport, the feeder airport for Vanuatu's northern islands. Contact Vanair at its **town office** (☎ 36421; Main St) and **airport office** (☎ 36506).

Santo's other commercial strip is northwest, at Lajmoli; if your flight goes that way, sit on the inland side to see the awesome central mountains.

Boat

For boats that call into Santo, see p809.

Luganville has **Customs** (☎ 36854, 36225), quarantine and **Immigration** (☎ 36724) facilities for yachts at Main Wharf, and a marine repair workshop at the Maritime College. Second Channel is the town's main anchorage and there's a clean sandy bottom out from the Beachfront Resort. Aore Island is the safest anchorage for yachts – 40m deep, and away from the southeasterlies that hit the mainland.

GETTING AROUND

Santo has a reasonable network of unsealed roads connecting Luganville with the southwest, north and east coasts; elsewhere you have to travel by boat or walk. The minibus fare between Pekoa airport and Luganville is 200Vt, while taxis charge from 600Vt, shared.

Car

Hire cars at **World Car Rental** (☎ 37711, 46722, 42288; fax 36030; leongmansan@vanuatu.com.vu), where a five-seater costs 9400Vt per day, or 4WDs from **Santo 4WD Rental** (☎ 37259, 43417; benbay@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 266), where rates start at 13,000Vt per day. Rates include insurance.

Minibus & Taxi

A minibus will pass you every minute in the centre of town. Hail one and you'll be dropped at the door of your destination. Regular services connect Luganville and Port Olry (500Vt), leaving Unity Shell Garage in

Luganville at about 5pm. To return, stand by the roadside in Port Olry before 7am.

There are plenty of taxis and public-transport trucks – with a red T on their number plates – operating around Luganville offering competitive rates.

Tours

Tours cost from 2000/4000Vt per half-/full-day. A typical day trip includes a visit to Fanafo, Matantas or Champagne Beach, and the Matevulu Blue Hole. When you book, check where you will go: not all guides have access to Champagne Beach, but you can walk across on a track from Lonnoc Beach.

An absolute must-do is **Millenium Cave** (p799), high in the hills inland from Luganville. Nearby is **Nampauk**. A tour to this fascinating village includes a scary fire-dancing ceremony. Other tours go to beautiful **Port Olry**, to the north, or to the **Vatthe Conservation Area**. Tours can be tailored to suit your interests, for example hiking or WWII touring. Tour operators (who will make arrangements to collect you when you book):

Heritage Tours (☎ 36862, 40968)

Little Paradise of Port Olry (☎ 37661, 37606, 43776; PO Box 115)

Paradise Tours (☎ 37159)

LUGANVILLE

pop 12,200

Vanuatu's northern capital has a wide main street that sprawls along several kilometres of waterfront with interesting views at every corner, two main parks and dozens of dusty shops.

The town has that sleepy tropical feel, as though something is about to happen. You think you belong even if you're only here a week. The council has a beautification programme in action, which will add to its pleasures.

The Luganville to Aore swim (see www.pacificswims.com/espirtu_about.html) is making it big in the grand ocean swims scene. It's a 2.6km swim in pretty tough ocean, held every year in June. People from Fiji, NZ and Australia battle against the locals.

Information

Ring ☎ 36112 for an ambulance, ☎ 36333 to report a fire, and ☎ 36222 to contact police. There's a pharmacy at the hospital

and two small chemist shops in town with a good range of deodorants. Bring anything more serious with you. Luganville is the only town outside Vila with commercial banking facilities. They're all on the main street.

ANZ (☎ 36711; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM.

Club de Sanma (☎ 36039; Main St; ☎ 9am-midnight) The money exchange here offers good rates.

Computer Net (☎ 37773; admin@comput.net; Internet per min 25Vt) There are great computers here, with the fastest connections in town.

NBV (☎ 36441; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11am Sat) Bank.

Northern District Hospital (☎ 36345) Perched above the town in Le Plateau.

Post office (☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) There's a cardphone outside.

Westpac (☎ 36625; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Bank.

Sights & Activities

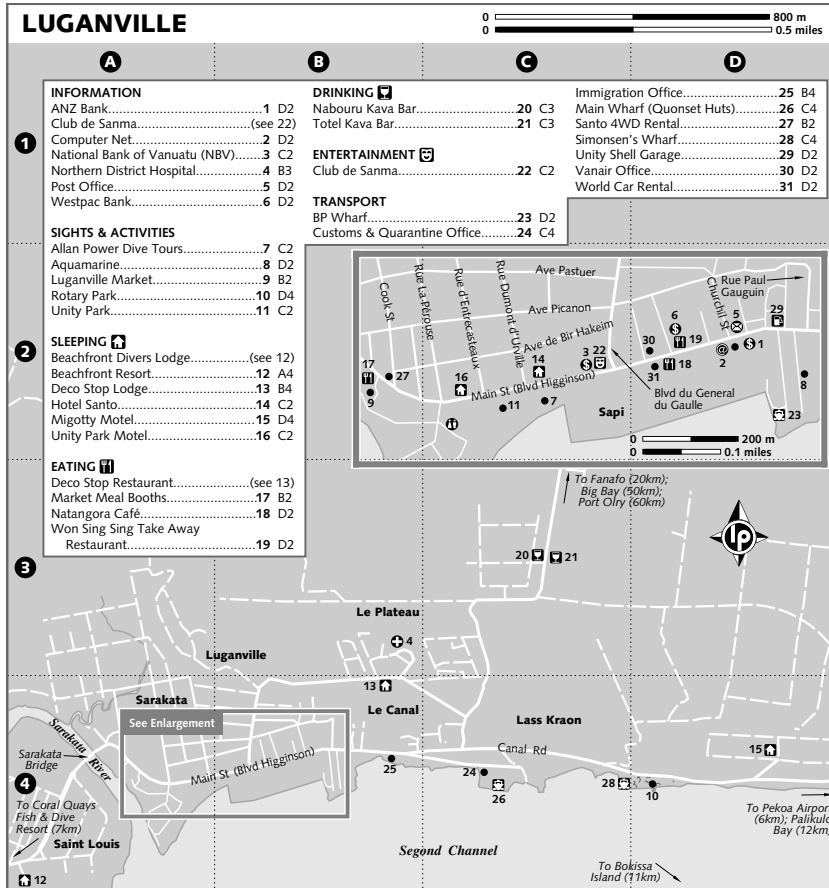
There are lots of **WWII remains** in town, such as the corrugated-iron **quonset huts** at Main Wharf and near Unity Park, and the rusting steel sea walls that are evidence of busier times. Million Dollar Point, where hundreds of tonnes of US military equipment was dumped, now shows its coral-encrusted machinery to snorkellers and divers (admission 500Vt per car).

Most people have never seen the elusive Lysepsep people, but spend time in the impenetrable mountains of Central Santo, and you may find them watching you. About 1m tall, they grow their hair very long and use it as a screen. The **Lysepsep Culture Park** (☎ 54491) will show you many of their unusual customs. You need to book a group, at least a day before, through your hotel.

Villagers come from all over to sell their produce at the **Luganville Market** (Main St; ☎ 24hr), near the Sarakata Bridge.

Unity Park spreads along the waterfront to the market. It has a kids' playground and lovely shade trees. Lie on the grass and look at the ocean. **Rotary Park** where boats leave for Bokissa has barbecues and plenty of grass.

The best place for **swimming** near Luganville is at the beach in front of the Beachfront Resort, where you're most welcome. Or head out to the beach on the way to Palikulo Point. A taxi ride out here will cost around 1200Vt return.



Sleeping

BUDGET

There's a fabulous range of places to choose from in Luganville.

Unity Park Motel (☎ 36052; locm@vanuatu.com.vu; Main St; s/d/tr/q 1350/2100/2400/3200Vt, private r from 2400Vt; ☎) Upstairs are lovely airy rooms along a sparkling hallway (ask for a front one with air-con for 3500Vt). Downstairs is more basic. The shared kitchen and bathroom facilities are tops, and there's a laundry. You can relax in the rotunda in the garden.

Migotty Motel (☎ 36494; migotty@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 40; s/d 3380/4500Vt; ☎) Hike up the hill, or hop on a bus, because this place is great. The balconies have good coastal views (ask for a front room), all rooms have en

suites, the gardens are pretty, and the bright new swimming pool is inviting. The snack bar serves breakfast (500Vt) and dinner (250Vt to 800Vt).

Beachfront Divers Lodge (☎ 36881; fax 36882; bfrsort@vanuatu.com.vu; dm 2500Vt) Custom-built for divers, with a secure wash area, this cottage sleeps eight people and has a kitchen and barbecue facilities. You can camp in the grounds.

MIDRANGE

Deco Stop Lodge (☎ 36175; www.decostop.com.vu; dm/s/d incl breakfast 4300/9500/9500Vt; ☎) High on the ridge behind Luganville overlooking Segond Channel, Deco Stop has a huge deck floating around the inviting swimming

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Santo (☎ 36250; hotelsanto@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d 6500/7500Vt, upstairs s/d/tr 11,000/12,000/13,000Vt; ☎ ☎) The place to see and be seen is this retro '70s hotel, with its fabulous huge *tamtam* in the foyer and deep plush lounge chairs. Sit out on the patio with a G&T and watch life come your way. Comfortable, spacious rooms open onto the pool area; more luxurious rooms are upstairs. Guests can hire hotel cars. Visa, Amex and MasterCard are accepted. The restaurant (meals 900Vt to 1600Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is pleasant, old-fashioned and comfortable, with an extensive menu that combines Western and local foods.

pool. There's a great social atmosphere and a large sports facility. Many rooms are set up for divers, with secure wash areas right behind. Transfers are 1200Vt.

Beachfront Resort (☎ 36881; fax 36882; bfresort@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr from 4500/6500/8500Vt, family unit 10,000Vt) A friendly, low-key spot with motel-style bungalows, all with kitchenettes. Walk across the lawn to an excellent black-sand beach. It's the best place to swim, even if you aren't staying. Owner Dave Cross (☎ 43911) is the person to talk to about tourist activities.

TOP END

The top-end resorts are all out of Luganville.

Coral Quays Fish & Dive Resort (☎ 36257; www.coralquays.com; s/d incl breakfast from 8500/9800Vt; ☎) This place has 18 bungalows with soaring ceilings set in a tropical garden. Use the private jetty to snorkel or dive over coral gardens and wrecks – the *Tui Twaite* shipwreck is 800m away. A secure wash and dry room is available. A minibus/taxi from town costs 100/300Vt; transfers are 600Vt. Kayaks, bikes and snorkel gear are available.

Aore Resort (☎ 36705; fax 36703; www.aoreresort.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast from 16,540/20,360/25,590Vt; ☎ ☎) Spacious bungalows with fabulous timber floors look out over moored yachts. Guests can use the snorkel gear, kayaks and mountain bikes (visitors can hire them). The restaurant (mains 950Vt to 1450Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is a grand, open area with views and friendly staff. Transfers

are 2500Vt. The resort ferry leaves from BP Wharf in Luganville – ask for the schedule when you book. Nonguests are welcome at the resort (1000Vt a day), but the rest of the island is privately owned.

Bokissa Eco Island Resort (☎ 36913; fax 36855; www.bokissa.com; s/d incl all meals 10,000/20,000Vt; ☎ ☎ ☎) The traditional bungalows are fluffy-white-towel luxurious. But you're out early because 10 footsteps away is astounding snorkelling over plate corals piled high, branches of soft coral, and anemones with their Nemos. The hammock calls from the shady trees, but there's kayaking up a river, diving, walks, turtle watching and a pool with a swim-up bar. Transfers from the mainland (3000Vt return) leave from Simonsen's Wharf in Luganville.

Eating

Coral Quays Resort (☎ 36257; mains 1600-2400Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At Coral Quays Fish & Dive Resort, this restaurant has a broad veranda that's a good spot to enjoy the gourmet food that the chef is famous for. You sit at timber tables made locally from natural wood. Some buses run into town till 11pm; prearrange transport if you come for dinner.

Won Sing Sing Take Away Restaurant (mains 200-850Vt; ☎ 7am-3pm) Bench tables under a grand traditional roof give this little café a happy atmosphere. The chef is very good – check out the cakes! Come for breakfast. It will set you up for a cheerful day.

Natangora Café (☎ 36811; Main St; meals 350-700Vt; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Specialises in breakfast, house-roasted coffee, hamburgers, salads, sandwiches and cakes. Sit out the back for garden and canal views. The pleasant alfresco setting and reasonable prices make it popular with local expats and ni-Vans alike.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Deco Stop Restaurant (mains 1500Vt; ☎ 7am-9pm) You're on top of the world, sitting around the beautiful pool, gazing way out over the channel, and choosing from an excellent menu. But don't go past the poulet fish filets, with Deco's secret sauce. Try to come for the curry night with magic show.

Market Meal Booths (meals 300Vt; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) Sit at a bright little table beside the market, and a cheery face appears at the booth window. There's a choice of five dishes, but steak's the best. You can watch it being cooked – flick and twist – and the meal is delicious.

Drinking & Entertainment

Apart from the eating-out options, the entertainment scene is pretty light-on in Luganville.

Club de Sanma (☎ 36039; clubdesanma@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 442; ☎ 9am-midnight) There are pool tables, and TV screens show all major international sports. It's a good spot for a beer on the balcony (shame about the poker machines), with happy hour from 5.30pm to 7.30pm. If you want to kick on, it's open till 3am Friday, the jazz and blues night.

Nabouru Kava Bar (☎ 37401) has a pleasant sitting area in a pretty garden, and the kava is fresh and strong. Across the road is Totel, if you like a traditional place. You'll be welcome at most of the 40 kava bars around Luganville – look for a red or green light outside.

Getting Around

You'll have no difficulty finding a minibus between 7am and 5.30pm, but it's a different story outside these hours. The standard rate anywhere around town is 100Vt. Ring **Erick** (☎ 42178) or **Simion** (☎ 40718) to organise your own bus.

Taxis and public-transport trucks wait at the market (on market days) or cruise up and down Main St. The market is the best place to find them after 5.30pm, or ring **Kal** (☎ 41287).

AROUND LUGANVILLE

The north road has a good surface and leads out to many top spots.

Matevulu Blue Hole

You must take a plunge here. It's something unique, looking through crystal at your pretty blue legs. Swim across to the old tree, the place to dive. Scuba-diving photography is a buzz here, as the blue filter produces unusual effects.

There are several 'blue holes' on Santo, but this is the largest and best – about 50m across and 18m deep.

Millenium Cave

Trek through the jungle, across creeks and cascades, to this massive cave, some 20m wide and 50m high. Climb down a bamboo ladder to a crystal pool, small cascades, sparkling stalactites and stalagmites, and little bats. Walk through to the sunlight and into the icy water to zap down the rapids on a kid's little floaty thingy past amazing towering rocks, gorgeous rain-forest and waterfalls, then scramble out all wet and shivery and start the climb back up to your bus. It's a totally absolutely grand experience.

Malwepe (Oyster Island)

A track heads down from the main road to a landing area where you catch the boat across to nearby Oyster Island – so named because there are lots of oysters in the waters. It's a charming place to kick back with a drink or enjoy a meal.

Oyster Island Resort (☎ /fax 36283; oysteril@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast 5300/5300/7300/9000Vt) This hideaway has seven cute dumplings of bungalows in a beautiful waterfront setting. Deep-water fishing, lobster fishing and scuba diving are available. The restaurant (mains 950Vt to 2500Vt; open lunch and dinner) is a rambling, rustic place, where the French owner-chef specialises in seafood – you must try the oysters, of course – and Santo beef. Reservations are advisable.

Getting there costs 300Vt by the regular Luganville-Port Olry minibus service (see p795) or 980Vt by taxi (minimum two people). To summon the boat, bang on the gas cylinder.

Fanafo

In 1963, charismatic Jimmy Stevens formed the Nagriamel movement. Then, on 27 May 1980, eight weeks before national independence, he and his supporters staged a coup known as the Coconut Rebellion. Armed mainly with bows and arrows, they occupied Luganville and proclaimed Santo's independence, calling their new country Vemarana. However, the new nation collapsed with Stevens' arrest on 1 September. Take a tour to visit this interesting group of villages where the grave of Jimmy Stevens is only partly filled in, so that his spirit can escape to complete his work.

THE LAND-DIVERS OF PENTECOST

The men of Pentecost spend many weeks building towers by binding tree trunks, saplings and branches to a tall tree with vines. The towers are the shape of a man up to 35m high. The tower sighs as it bends in the wind; you'll sigh, as you see the men make their spectacular leaps to ensure a successful harvest.

Each diver carefully selects his own liana vines, then an experienced elder checks to ensure that it's strong and elastic enough. The soil in front of the tower is cleared of rocks, then loosened. Fathers teach their young sons to dive from their shoulders. Boys practise diving from boulders into the sea. At age eight they are circumcised; then they can make their first jump.

Between 20 and 60 males per village will dive. Each man prepares in turn while his friends tie his vines. The women sing and dance below. As he raises his hands he tells the crowd his most intimate thoughts; the people stop their singing and dancing, and stand quietly – these could be his last words.

Finally the diver claps his hands, crosses his arms and leans forward. In slow motion, falling, he arches his back. The vines abruptly stop him. Only his hair will have touched the soil, to fertilise the yam crop. The crowd roars its appreciation, dancing, stomping and whistling in tribute.

It is awful to watch – gut-wrenching yet mesmerising. The colour and sounds add to the atmosphere: men wearing small red-dyed *namba*, clearly visible from so high above; women wearing white grass skirts made from wild hibiscus, spinning and twirling – a sea of swirling white grass.

Lonorore airfield is often closed by rain. If you're stuck, you can get to Sara airfield by truck up the west coast road, a set of ruts hanging onto cliff faces (30,000Vt); or to Craig Cove in Ambrym by speedboat (20,000Vt).

For information about boats that call into Pentecost, see p809.

Pentecost has good protection from the southeastern trade winds along the west coast, with many anchorages and landing places. Panas and Loltong are popular.

NORTHERN PENTECOST

Just 1km west of Sara airfield at **Nazareth** is Lini Memorial College, where Vanuatu's first prime minister is buried. There are also stores, an NBV bank and a market. A local disco fires up on Friday and Saturday nights at the Abawuntora Youth Centre.

The **Ezekiel Bonga Guesthouse** (☎ 38388; Nazareth; beds 1800Vt) has pleasant rooms above a shop, but the squat toilet is down through the village. You must bring food, coffee and so on – a kettle of water is supplied. About 2km down the coast, sitting prettily on the white-sand beach, are the **Beachside Bungalows** (☎ 38280; Abwatuntora; s/d incl all meals 2000/4000Vt). Locals strike their canoes with bamboo to make the dolphins leap in play. Be sure to ask for Leslie Rono when you book.

Loltong Restaurant (Loltong; meals 300Vt), in the island's principal administrative centre, sells island-style meals, kava and handicrafts. Loltong has an excellent anchorage, and you can hire taxis here.

SOUTHERN PENTECOST

A sandy beach extends 12km from just before Lonorore airfield south to Ranputor. Coconut plantations occupy the narrow plains between mountains and sea.

There's a snack bar and cardphone at the airport, and a post office and clinic nearby. There's also the very pleasant **Airport Rest-house** (☎ 38356; beds 500Vt), with a flush toilet and washing room, in case you are stranded. A land-dive tower is built on a hill near the end of the runway each year.

For transport around the south, ring **John** (☎ 38444, 38399) or **Clement** (☎ 38814, 38120).

Land-Dive Villages

Two land-dive towers are erected annually on the hills between **Panas** and nearby **Wali**. Another tower is built at St Joseph (Rangusuksu).

Pangi and **Salap** spread along the stony shore of peaceful Bay Homo. Pangi has a kava bar, an ANZ bank, a clinic and John's store, and you can hire taxis and speedboats. **Swimming** and **snorkelling** are safe because of the reef. **Land-diving** (☎ 38444; all inclusive 23,000Vt)

SOME OTHER NORTHERN ISLANDS

Ambae

Ambae has **Mt Lombenben** (1496m) on the rim of a semiactive volcano that is currently rumbling dynamically. A cone rose up out of blue **Lake Manaro Lakua**, one of its famous crater lakes, late in 2005, and it sends white and black smoke shooting high – this was world news. Hot and lime-green **Lake Vui** also sends vulcanologists into a frenzy whenever it boils. **Lake Manaro Ngoru**, the third crater lake, is dry with a central cold-water spring. All this in a blanket of mist amid the finest cloud forest in Vanuatu. Pretty **Duviara, the Last Stop Bungalows** (☎ 38368, 38378; fax 38335; dpvuhu@hotmail.com; beds 2000Vt) offers bungalow and guesthouse accommodation, where Paul Vuhu takes lake treks and walks through the cloud forest. Transfers cost 3000Vt, and meals are 200Vt.

Maewo

The 'Island of Water' has rivers, hot springs, deep cold pools, magnificent waterfalls and watertaro terraces. **Big Water** waterfall is thought of as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Down south, at **Sanasom**, is magnificent **Hole of the Moon cave** and **Malangauliuli**, a cave with spectacular petroglyphs. Sleeping and eating options:

Asanvari Yacht Club Bungalow, Bar & Restaurant (☎ 38239; Asanvari; beds 1000Vt) On a picture-perfect bay and near a 30m waterfall. Chief Nelson arranges tours to the cave and transport from North Pentecost (5000Vt). Meals (500Vt to 950Vt) are served from 7.30am to 7pm.

Lua ete Salgolo Guesthouse (☎ 38342; Naone; s incl all meals 1500Vt) A cute little place from where you can explore Big Water. Ask for Nathaniel.

Sanasom Bungalows (☎ 38353, 38239; Sanasom; s incl all meals 3200Vt) Lovely bungalows run by Chief Jonah, *kastom* owner of the cave. Transport from Naone is around 5000Vt.

Gaua (Santa Maria)

Gaua offers spectacular hikes, including a grand, difficult two-day test that encompasses the island's three major sights – pretty **Lake Letas**, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the Pacific; Mt Garek (797m), a semiactive volcano; and fabulous **Siri Falls**. Wind and climb up to the lake, where you can canoe across to the volcano, a sulphurous mess that seeps orange into the lake. It's well worth the effort, in an awesome way. Then it's a vicious trek to make it down to the falls, 120m of roaring power pummelling down through the bush to the sea. You can stay at the thatched three-bedroom **Wongrass Bungalow** (☎ 38504; s incl meals 4000Vt), set in a lovely garden. Charles will arrange all of your tours and serve you excellent meals.

Vanua Lava

Sola, the island's capital, is the centre for excellent walks, like the glorious day's walk past Mosina and the plateau overlooking Vureas Bay, through water taro gardens, over streams and rapids to **Waterfall Bay**, one of the Banks Islands' most dramatic sights. Spectacular **Sasara Falls** tumble over the cliff straight into the bay. A speedboat from Sola to Waterfall Bay costs around 18,000Vt return. Sleeping and eating options:

Leumerous Guesthouse (☎ 38556, 38823; Sola; s incl all meals 2500Vt, camping 500Vt) Thatched bungalows set in pretty grounds close to the centre of Sola.

Leumerous Yachtclub (mains 300-750Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Behind the bungalows, this is everybody's favourite spot.

Waterfall Bay Yacht Club (meals 400Vt) In a grand bungalow with artefacts and handicrafts for sale.

Waterfall Bungalow (☎ 38550; Waterfall Bay; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) Only minutes from the falls, you'll think you've arrived in paradise.

Torres Islands

Dazzling white-sand beaches are the rule, with good surfing, especially when the trade winds are blowing. There's excellent **snorkelling** on most islands: **Linua**, which is unpopulated except for the tourist accommodation; **Loh**, across a tidal sandbank; **Tegua** and **Hiu** to the north; and **Toga** where most of the people live. Everyone gets around in outrigger canoes. Five minutes from the airport, the delightful **Kamilisa Guesthouse** (☎ 38573, 38565; Linua; s incl meals 2000Vt) is in a delicate rainforest, right on the lagoon. Butterfly lovers will find this place amazing.

for tourists occurs twice, in April and May; ask for Chief Willy. Up to 50 men jump.

Ranwas is a charming village perched on a high ridge with distant views of the sea. From here a slippery path heads north to Bunlap and Baie Barrier. **Ratap**, on the way to Ranwas, has very traditional land-diving.

Bunlap is a large, full-kastom village on a steep hillside, again with very traditional land-diving, two ceremonial dancing areas ringed with coral stones, and traditional leaf houses that are built so low that their roofs almost touch the ground.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you're very fit, you can hike from Salap to Bunlap, spend a night at Bunlap, then return along the 4WD road straight across the bottom of the island. Walking conditions are difficult and strenuous – ask in the village for a guide.

Take **adventure walks** to waterfalls and *banyans* and the stone ruins of a feasting hall, where 100 people were killed by the eel spirit. Other tours include visits to villages to see *kastom* dances. Or walk up a river with your host and help him catch river prawns. How fresh will they be!

From Salap to Bunlap costs 4000Vt by speedboat or taxi.

SLEEPING & EATING

Nangol Bungalows (☎/fax 38448, ☎ 38444; s/d incl all meals 5600/9000Vt, camping 500Vt) Just south of Salap, Nangol has a relaxing setting by the bay with several spacious bungalows and good shared facilities.

Clement Bungalow (☎ 38814, 38120; Pang; s 1500Vt) A very new little bungalow of bamboo and sago palm is on the beach in Pang near the store and restaurants. It can sleep five people. Meals are 500Vt. Ask for Clement and he'll look after you – he also has a truck!

Nangol Restaurant (☎/fax 38448, ☎ 38444; meals 500–1000Vt; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by the owners of Nangol Bungalows, this place is on the beach. Enjoy bread baked on the open fire. An island feast with a local string band can be arranged for six or more people.

Pangi is the tourist hub of South Pen-tecost with four **restaurants** (☎ 38120, 38327; meals 150–300Vt; ☺ 6am–9pm Mon–Fri). Each owner cooks the one dish, perhaps curried fish and rice, and stays open till it's all sold.

Transport from Lonorore airfield to Pang by truck or boat is 3000Vt.

VANUATU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The prices specified in this section are per person per night.

Tanna has the only camping ground (p783), but lots of places are happy for you to use their grounds for a minimal fee.

Guesthouses are usually concrete buildings without much character but with fully equipped kitchens. They cost between

PRACTICALITIES

- The major newspapers are the *Daily Post* (100Vt; available Monday to Saturday) and the *Independent* (200Vt; available Sunday). *Port Vila Presse* is only on the web: www.news.vu/en/. *Pacific Magazine* (www.pacificmagazine.cc), published by Pacific Basin Communications, often has information on Vanuatu; *Islands Business* (www.islandsbusiness.com) covers all the South Pacific islands.
- The country's radio station, Radio Vanuatu, provides trilingual FM, AM and SW services from 6am to 10pm, and offers international and local news bulletins (98 on the FM dial, 1125 on AM). You can also pick up the BBC at 99FM. There are three TV channels: Local TV from 4.30pm to 11.30pm, American gospel, and Chinese news in English. The pubs provide satellite coverage of international sporting events.
- Videos you buy or watch will be based on the PAL system.
- Town power is provided in Vila, Luganville, Lenakel and Lakatoro. A few rural guesthouses have their own generators or use solar power, with electricity available until 9pm. Elsewhere it's kerosene lamps or torchlight. The current in Vanuatu is 220V to 240V, 50Hz AC, using flat two- or three-pin plugs.
- Vanuatu uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

1000Vt and 2000Vt. Bungalows are quaint thatched cubby houses with pandanus-leaf walls, often set in gorgeous surroundings. It's a good idea to bring your own toilet paper, earplugs and torch. Bungalows cost between 1800Vt and 4500Vt and generally include meals.

There's an impressive selection of resorts and hotels in and around Vila, and there are a few on Santo and Tanna. Many lovely hotels cost under 7000Vt for a double, while luxury resorts start at around 18,000Vt per double.

ACTIVITIES

It's easy to be very lazy in Vanuatu, but it's also difficult to ignore the excellent diving, snorkelling, hiking, fishing, sailing and extreme sports. Then it's also great to get immersed in the country's culture and natural environment.

Diving

Vanuatu's scuba sites include several world-class dives. Some are spotlighted in the South Pacific Diving chapter, see p74. Vila has the best range of underwater topography in a small area, while Santo has the best wreck, coral and fish dives. *The Lady and the President*, by Peter Stone, covers the tragedy of war and delights of scuba diving with great photos of USS *President Coolidge*.

For details of dive-tour operators, see the sections on Efate (p770) and Santo (p793).

Fishing

World-standard game fishing, river fishing and spear fishing are on offer in Vanuatu – if it lives in water you can enjoy chasing it, with string and a bent pin or the latest hi-tech gear. Always check who owns the water, though, and pay them first. See p770 and p795 for operators.

Hiking

The country has many fine walks, including strenuous two- to five-day hikes on Erromango, Ambrym, Santo, Gaua and Malekula. You can organise walks yourself using a guide from where you're staying (guides cost between 1000Vt and 3000Vt a day) or through tour operators (see p766).

Always wear long pants in the jungle to protect yourself from stinging plants.

Sandals and runners are not suitable for jungle hiking or volcano climbs.

Swimming

Although the swimming close to Vila is not brilliant, further afield there are hundreds of glorious beaches. Many sandy ones are black, while others are brilliant white. Sharks, stonefish and strong currents are a danger in some areas. Always seek local advice before plunging in.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are generally open from Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 11.30am, and from 1.30pm to 4.30pm, and sometimes on Saturday morning as well. Shops normally begin trading at 7.30am and go through to around 6pm; only some close for the midday siesta. Saturday shopping generally finishes at 11.30am, although Chinese stores remain open all weekend.

CHILDREN

Children will enjoy the freedom of being in this laid-back environment. Encourage them to read *Vanuatu & New Caledonia* by Carol Jones before you go. It's a cheerful book about the region and its people, set out as postcards with lots of maps and photos.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Vanuatu's Diplomatic Representatives

Vanuatu does not have embassies or consulates overseas. Honorary consuls:

Australia NSW (☎ 02-9597 4046); Victoria (☎ 03-9642 8888; australia_vanuatu@dfat.gov.au)

France (☎ 01 40 53 82 25; ambafra@vanuatu.com.vu)

Contact details for other consuls can be obtained from the **Foreign Affairs Department** (☎ 22347; www.vanuatugovernment.gov.vu; Port Vila).

Embassies & Consulates in Vanuatu

All the diplomatic representations to Vanuatu are in Port Vila. High commissions or embassies:

Australia (☎ 22777; fax 23948; KPMG House, rue Pasteur) High commission.

China (☎ 22598; fax 24877; rue d'Auvergne) Embassy.

France (☎ 22353; fax 22696; Lini Hwy) Embassy.

New Zealand (☎ 22933; brian.smythe@mfat.govt.nz; Lini Hwy) High commission.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Jon Frum Day (15 February) Prayers and flowers are offered in the church at Sulphur Bay, followed by a flag-raising ceremony and military parade, where men armed with bamboo rifles march like US Army sergeants.

Yam Festival (April) There's dancing and feasting in the villages to praise the harvest.

Naghol (April-May) A spectacular, impressive land-diving ritual that occurs annually in several villages in Pentecost.

Cross Island Relay (May-June) Teams of seven come from all over the nation. The leaders set out from Lenakel, and the race finishes at Mt Yasur car park. Contact a local resort to join a team.

Horse-Racing Carnivals (July-September) Races are held during winter at old Burton airport and on the Mt Yasur ash plains. Those are an awesome sight.

Independence Day (July 30) Vanuatu's most important annual event. Vila has the widest range of activities:

sporting events, a military parade and fun stalls at Independence Park; canoe and yacht races in the bay; string-band competitions; and *kastom* dancing.

Circumcision Ceremonies (August-September) Dancing, colourful costumes, face and body paint, and a grand feast celebrate the rite of passage of a boy. Tourists are welcome to watch but need a ni-Van guide as there are serious restrictions to where you can walk.

Mini Games (August-September) Tanna athletes compete at the Lenakel Soccer Stadium for positions in the Tafea Games.

Nekowiar and Toka Ceremony (September-October every three years) A three-day extravaganza of dancing and feasting, while villages cement relationships and arrange marriages. The place and date is only announced close to the time.

Cultural Spirit Arts and Carving Exhibition (October) Local artists and artisans are invited to exhibit their craft in Lenakel, focussing on a different theme each year.

Two useful calendars can be found at: www.vanuatu-tourism.com/vanuatu/cms/en/events/calendar.html and www.talpacific.com/vanuatu/guide.htm.

INTERNET ACCESS

You can access the Internet at a few places in Vila, Luganville and Lenakel, and at many resorts, but there are no opportunities to get online on the more remote islands.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Vanuatu A to Z (www.vanuatuatoz.com) All you wanted to know, but didn't know where to ask.

Vanuatu Hotel Directory (www.vanuatu-hotels.vu) A local online booking service, with information about the country and useful links.

Vanuatu News Online (www.presse.com.vu) *Port Vila Presse*, the local rag, went on the web when the paper closed. Get the latest news as it comes to hand.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (www.vanuatu-tourism.com) Has stacks of useful information and links to local agents and online booking services.

Volcano Live (www.volcanolive.com) Maintained by an Australian volcanologist and adventurer, it has stacks of info and pictures on Vanuatu volcanoes. Start at Most Active Volcanoes.

Wantok Environment Centre (www.positiveearth.org) Information includes pictures and details of island bungalows, tourist attractions, ecotourism projects, and pictures of Vanuatu's birds, with sound recordings of their calls.

Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Vanuatu) The encyclopaedia has in-depth information on all aspects of Vanuatu's history, neatly cross-referenced.

MONEY

Vanuatu currency is the Vatu (Vt), which floats against a basket of currencies including the US dollar, so it is reasonably stable. Exchange rates are given in the following table.

Country	Unit	Vatu
Australia	A\$1	83Vt
Canada	C\$1	98Vt
CFP zone	100 CFP	115Vt
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	212Vt
euro zone	€1	138Vt
Fiji	F\$1	63Vt
Japan	¥100	96Vt
NZ	NZ\$1	70Vt
Samoa	ST1	38Vt
Solomon Islands	\$S1	15Vt
Tonga	T\$1	54Vt
UK	£1	200Vt
USA	US\$1	109Vt

Moneychangers

The three commercial banks in Vanuatu are ANZ, Westpac and the local NBV. All have their offices in central Vila and branches in Luganville. ANZ has a couple of ATMs in Vila, one at Bauerfield airport (just north of Vila) and one at its Luganville branch, while Westpac has one in Vila.

There are also private moneychangers in Vila and Luganville.

Duty-free shops, restaurants and hotels in Vila should have no difficulties with credit cards, or cash and travellers cheques in major international currencies. However,

HOW MUCH?

- **Local newspaper:** 100Vt
- **Hair extensions:** 15,000Vt
- **Waterfront 600 sq m block:** 6,500,000Vt
- **Hand-carved outrigger canoe:** 3000Vt
- **Car hire:** 6500Vt per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 125Vt
- **1L bottled water:** 120Vt
- **Bottle of Tusker beer:** 350-450Vt
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 350-950Vt
- **Quarter chicken, fries and salad:** 520Vt

the few hotels outside the capital may only accept Australian or US dollars.

Take plenty of Vatu to rural Vanuatu as you won't be able to change foreign currencies or access any accounts.

TELEPHONE & FAX International Calls

The code for international calls from Vanuatu is ☎ 00. Vanuatu's international telephone code is ☎ 678.

There are two zones for international call rates from Vanuatu: neighbourhood (Australia, NZ, New Caledonia and Fiji) which costs 133/108Vt per minute peak/off-peak; and the rest of the world (216/168Vt peak/off-peak). Peak times are 6am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

Many larger hotels have IDD phones, but you cannot make international reverse-charge calls from Vanuatu.

Mobile Phones

Vanuatu is in the GSM digital network but only has coverage around Vila, Luganville and Norsup. It's a bit expensive to use your own SIM card with a roaming facility. You may find it better to buy a SIM card package (9000Vt including 6500Vt of calls) in Vila; consult **Telecom Vanuatu** (www.smile.com.vu), although the site is somewhat out of date.

Phonecards

There are no coin-operated public phones; all phones need a phonecard. Postal agencies

usually sell them, but it's worth buying them in Vila or Luganville (they make excellent gifts anyway), and always travel with a couple of spare ones.

There are six cards available, from 450Vt to 2700Vt.

Local and international fax facilities are available at Vila's post office and the Telecom Vanuatu office in Luganville. The cheapest time (off-peak) to make a domestic call is between 6pm and 6am Monday to Friday and all weekend.

There are no area codes in Vanuatu.

TIME

Vanuatu time is GMT/UMT plus 11 hours. Noon in Vila is 1am in London, 6pm in Los Angeles and 1pm in Auckland.

TOURIST INFORMATION Local Tourist Offices

The official tourism office is in Vila: **Vanuatu Tourism Office** (VTO; ☎ 22813, 22515; www.vanuatu-tourism.com). It has a very informative website and includes details of VTO's overseas representatives. The travel agencies (p766) in Port Vila will give you information about the whole country, and arrange your trip if you want. Their websites are packed with images.

Tour operators (p771) offer a great variety of sight-seeing and action-packed activities, mostly around Efate.

Useful websites include **Wantok Environment Centre** (www.positiveearth.org/), for information about the outer islands, and **Vanuatu Adventure Travel** (www.vanuatu-adventure-travel.vu), which is full of ideas for island-hopping safaris.

This chapter simply can't do the country justice. For further details, consult Lonely Planet's *Vanuatu*. Alternatively, contact the Vanuatu Tourism Office and the tour operators.

VISAS

Every visitor must have a passport valid for a further four months and an onward ticket. Entry visas are not required for nationals of the British Commonwealth and EU. Check at www.vanuatu-tourism.com/visa_info.htm to see whether you need one. You're allowed an initial stay of up to 30 days, extended one month at a time for up to four months.

Nonexempt visitors should contact the **Principal Immigration Officer** (☎ 22354; fax 25492; PMB 092, Port Vila) to organise their visa application (2500Vt fee). This must be finalised *before* your arrival in the country.

Visa extensions require leaving your passport and onward ticket with the immigration department in Vila or Luganville for about three days.

TRANSPORT IN VANUATU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The following airlines have regular scheduled flights to Vanuatu.

Air Pacific (☎ 22836; www.airpacific.com; Lini Hwy, Vila) South Pacific Travel in Vila is Air Pacific's agent.

Air Vanuatu (☎ 23848; www.airvanuatu.com; rue de Paris, Vila)

Aircalin (☎ 22019; www.aircalin.nc; Lini Hwy, Vila) The New Caledonian airline.

Pacific Blue (☎ 07-3295 2284; www.flypacificblue.com/; Brisbane, Australia)

Qantas Airways (www.qantas.com.au) Acts as the sales agent for Air Vanuatu in all areas outside Australia, NZ, Fiji and New Caledonia.

Both Air Vanuatu and Pacific Blue operate direct flights from Brisbane and Sydney to Port Vila. Return fares from Sydney start from A\$780/870 in the low/high season; from Brisbane it's A\$670/750.

Air Vanuatu has direct flights from Auckland to Vila, and flights via Nadi (Fiji), Honiara (Solomon Islands) and Noumea (New Caledonia). Return low-season fares start from NZ\$948 for the direct flights. Air Pacific and Aircalin also have flights from Nadi and Noumea. For other Pacific islands you need to get connecting flights in NZ, Fiji or New Caledonia.

Talpacific Holidays (☎ 09-914 8728; www.travelrange.co.nz) is a good South Pacific travel agent.

AIRPORTS

Vanuatu's international airport, Bauerfield, is 6km north of Port Vila. It has an ANZ ATM, an NBV branch for currency exchange, a café and duty-free shopping. If you haven't organised accommodation, **Vanuatu**

Standby Accommodation (www.vanuatustandbyaccommodation.com), in a booth at the airport, can arrange it on the spot, and its website is full of information and useful links.

Sea

MV Havannah (☎ 25225, 23889; Port Vila) runs a monthly service out of Noumea to Vila, Malekula and Santo. Contact Frank Maki.

Vila hosts P&O's *Pacific Sky* and *Pacific Princess* about once or twice a fortnight. **South Sea Shipping** (☎ 22205; southsea@vanuatu.com.vu) in Vila is the agent.

The best sources of general information on yachting matters are the **Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club** (☎ 24634; Lini Hwy), at Anchor Inn, and **Waterfront Bar & Grill** (☎ 23490; Lini Hwy).

Touring yachts are not permitted to make landfall in or depart from Vanuatu until they have cleared customs and immigration at Vila, Luganville (Santo), Lenakel (Tanna) or Sola (Vanua Lava), the authorised ports of entry. There are hefty fines for disobeying this rule. There is a landing fee of 7000Vt for the first 30 days and 100Vt per day thereafter.

GETTING AROUND

Vanair is Vanuatu's only domestic air carrier. It offers scheduled flights to 28 airfields using its fleet of 20-seat Twin Otters, a 44-seat ATR and a tiny nine-seat Islander. While the service is generally reliable, major delays are also common, so don't try to make connecting flights on the same day.

Check prices and schedules and book online with **Vanair head office** (☎ 25025; www.vanair.vu; rue de Paris, Vila) or at the **Luganville office** (☎ 36421; Main St, Luganville). Flights booked directly with Vanair receive a 20% discount. Children aged between two and 12 fly half-price. Students get a 25% discount with, for example, an International Student Identity Card (ISIC).

It pays to book your seat well in advance and it's very important to reconfirm your flights.

Land

BUS & TAXI

Public minibuses with a red B fixed to their numberplates operate in Vila, Luganville, eastern Santo and eastern Malekula. They don't run fixed routes but zoom to their

passengers' various destinations. Flag them down by the roadside.

Taxis in Vila and Luganville are mostly conventional sedans, while in rural areas they're 4WD trucks with a red T on their number plates. Charges depend on distance, but also on the state of the road. Ask your chosen driver for a price. It will be honest and reasonable. A short trip in Vila might cost 400Vt, but a day charter will cost between 8000Vt and 12,000Vt. The local taxis meet each flight at bush airfields, but they may not be around on Sunday and public holidays in rural areas.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can hire cars and 4WD vehicles in Vila and Luganville, and scooters in Vila. The minimum age for renting a car is 23; for a scooter it's 17, provided you hold a valid driving licence.

An International Driving Licence is not needed, however, you must have held your licence for at least a year. There's a speed limit of 50km/h in Vila and Luganville, but once out of town speed is dictated by road conditions (often pretty terrible). Vehicles drive on the right and seatbelts are not compulsory.

Sea

PASSENGER BOATS

Powered catamaran *Diepsea*, operated by **Island Gateway** (☎ 22662, 51595; islandgateway@vanuatu.com.vu), goes to Espiritu Santo via the Shepherds, Epi and Malekula each Friday (7000Vt), returning via Ambae, Maewo, Pentecost, Ambrym and Paama on Saturday (7000Vt). A second loop goes to Tanna (6000Vt) on Monday or Tuesday via Erromango, returning to Vila on Tuesday or Wednesday (6000Vt). Able to carry up to 58 people, the catamaran has comfortable seating, refreshments and onboard entertainment.

Pelsaert (☎ 22743, 49094; fax 27763; adventure@vanuatu.com.vu), a 21m Precision, runs to Tanna twice-weekly, docking at Port Resolution on Tuesday and Lenakel on Thursday (one way 5500Vt, 10 hours). On Friday it goes to Litslits on Malekula (5000Vt, 14 hours), and on to Luganville on Santo (6500Vt). It returns to Vila on Sunday (6500Vt). Reclining upholstered seats cater for up to 70 people.

CARGO BOATS

Travelling around Vanuatu by cargo boat might seem like an adventure, but it can be very long and unpleasant if the sea is rough, which it usually is. Bring a pillow and warm cover, ask if there are beds, and check the food and water situation. Boats leave Vila from the old wharf behind Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway, or the Main Wharf on Wharf Rd.

Information on cargo boats leaving Port Vila to outer islands is posted in the VTO office (p766), or ask about a boat's movements at your local kava bar. Reliable cargo boats that take passengers on their weekly rounds:

Brisk (☎ 36517, 43744; Sealink, Santo) Santo, Pentecost, Ambrym, Epi, Vila.

Dinh 1 (☎ 22865; Dinh Shipping, Vila) Vila, Tanna, Malekula, Santo.

Sarafenua (☎ 24135, 46164; baboak@ifira.com.vu; Ifira, Vila) Vila, Epi, Paama, Santo, Pentecost, Ambrym, Ambae, Erromango, Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Aniwa.

CANOE & SPEEDBOAT

When ni-Vanuatu talk of speedboats, they mean outboard-powered dinghies. Canoes are dugout craft with outriggers, paddle-powered. Speedboat prices are high, so it's best to wait for a scheduled service rather than charter, if you can.

YACHT

You can charter a cruising catamaran with skipper and crew. Contacts:

Adventure Centre (www.adventurevanuatu.com; Port Vila) Has a 42ft trimaran *Golden Wing* (75,000Vt per 24 hours) and a 44ft catamaran *Margarita* (95,000Vt per 24 hours).

Bali Hai Charters (☎ 27202, 46058; balihaicharters@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 1011) Has a 38ft trimaran *Witchitit* (11,200Vt per person per 24 hours). Make meeting-place arrangements when you ring.

Tours

The wide variety on offer includes cultural, diving, bushwalking, bus and boat tours. Operators in central Vila:

Adventure Centre (☎ 22743; www.adventurevanuatu.com)

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Horizon Tours (☎ 25053; fax 24275; www.vanuatu tourism.com/)

Island Safaris Vanuatu (☎ 23288; www.islands vanuatu.com)

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

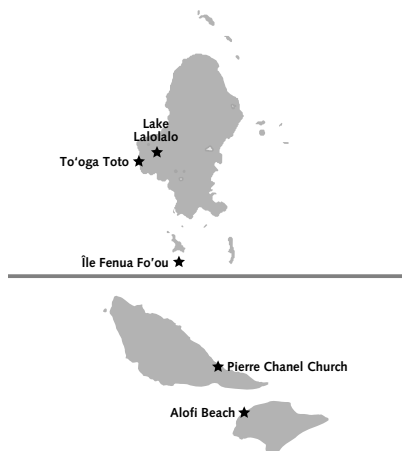
Wallis & Futuna

These two forgotten specks that lie smack in the centre of Polynesia/Melanesia make up one of the world's least known countries. The inhabitants, who are markedly more reserved than in most Polynesian isles, are happy to keep it that way. And why not? This French colony has managed to keep its culture remarkably intact throughout serious Catholicism and a strong French presence. France pours in the money and the people continue to live as they always have, fishing and planting taro and manioc – but now they also drive brand-new Toyota 4WDs, go to church and watch satellite TV. This is a country that has figured out how to get all the perks of colonialism without losing its soul. There are no plans for a push for tourism and, as long as the airfares and cost of living stays as high as they are (this place makes Tahiti seem cheap), it's not likely to receive heaps of honeymooners or package tourists any time in the near future. Movements for independence are few: the hospitals, schools and highly paid government jobs are all welcome enough additions that the people are happy to put up with a few handfuls of French expats.

Wallis and Futuna, which lie 230km away from each other, are linked through French colonialism, period. Wallis has ancestral connections with Tonga while Futuna traces its roots to Samoa. This is evident in the languages, which are quite different although mutually comprehensible, as well as the Samoan-like tapa designs of the Futunans and the Tongan-influenced designs found on Wallis. The two islands remain competitive with each other but Wallis, being more populous and the centre of government, retains the upper hand.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Camp out in a communal *fale* (house) on the mosquito-free *motu* (island) on **Île Fenua Fo'ou** (p816), Wallis
- Listen to the cacophony of bird calls around Wallis' **Lake Lalolalo** (p816)
- Feel the ancient Tongan presence while visiting the remote, vine-covered ruins of **To'oga Toto** (p816) on Wallis
- Marvel at the imposing tower and graceful tapa decorations at **Pierre Chanel Church** (p817), Futuna
- Laze around on a perfect, empty beach on **Alofi** (p818)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

It's not surprising that, being in the middle of the tropics, Wallis and Futuna are markedly hot and humid. The sweatiest months are between November and March, while more temperate weather can be expected from April to October. Rain is likely at least 260 days of the year; Wallis averages an impressive 3m of rainfall a year, while Futuna gets a lush 4m on average. Both islands experience occasional cyclones (the season is May to October). The most destructive recorded cyclone was Raja, which ravaged the islands in 1986. See p827 for Pacific climate charts.

HISTORY

Wallis and Futuna were populated when the great Lapita settlement wave moved across the Pacific between 1500 BC and 500 BC. Objects found on Futuna have been dated to 800 BC, although it's probable there are even older sites. Later Futuna came under the influence of Samoa while Wallis suffered repeated invasions from Tonga, starting around AD 1400. The ferocity of the Tongan invasions ensured their position in the island's oral histories and today Tongan forts are some of the only remaining archaeological sites.

The Dutch explorers Jacques Le Maire and Wilhelm Schouten chanced upon Futuna in 1616 and named the island Hoorn, after their home port (the same Hoorn after which Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America is named). The next visitor, the English navigator Samuel Wallis who had recently discovered Tahiti, arrived at Uvea in 1767. Again the island was renamed but Wallis' name, unlike Hoorn, has stuck.

In the first half of the 19th century the islands became popular stops for whaling ships, followed by traders, *bêche-de-mer* gatherers and, inevitably, missionaries. The first Catholic Marist missionaries, including Pierre Bataillon on Wallis and Pierre Chanel on Futuna, arrived in 1837. In 1841 Chanel was murdered by King Niuluki, an action which was to make Pierre Chanel the Pacific's first saint (see p812). In the second half of the century France gradually began to assume control of the islands, officially taking control over the years 1886 to 1888.

WALLIS & FUTUNA FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Mata'Utu (Wallis)
- **Population:** 14,944
- **Land area:** 247 sq km
- **International telephone code:** 681
- **Currency:** Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)
- **Languages:** Wallisian, Futunan and French
- **Greeting:** *Malo* (Wallisian), *Maro* (Futunan), *Bonjour* (French)
- **Website:** www.wallis.co.nc in French

Things remained quiet until WWII when Wallis and Futuna was the only French colony to side with the collaborationist Vichy government, despite pressure from New Caledonia. The arrival of war in the Pacific ended that phase and in May 1942 the 5000 Wallisians suddenly found 2000 American forces coming ashore. Airstrips were built – the one at Hihifo is still in use today. At its peak there were 6000 Americans on Wallis and their presence deeply influenced traditional culture.

On 29 July 1961 Wallis and Futuna officially became a French *Territoire d'Outre-Mer* (overseas territory). These days, there appears to be little local sentiment in favour of independence from France.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

Despite French presence and devout Catholicism, Wallis and Futuna are still very steeped in local tradition. Day-to-day life is dictated by a rigid social and class structure. The ruling class, the *aliki*, make all the decisions, hold all the important jobs and make most of the money. The king is elected from one of the upper-class families by the *aliki*, and as long as he (or she as is sometimes the case on Wallis but never on Futuna) manages to represent the other classes in a satisfactory manner and share the wealth, they will win continued support. Because there are several royal, *aliki* families, the power has always remained balanced, shifting to a new king and/or family when popular demand asked for a change. This remains true

ST PIERRE CHANEL OF OCEANIA Errol Hunt

Pierre Louis Marie Chanel was born into a French peasant family in 1802, and trained as a priest. He embarked for the Pacific islands with the newly formed Catholic Society of Mary (Marist) in 1836 and, the following year, was the first missionary to set foot on Futuna. The ruling king, Niuluki, welcomed him.

As the missionaries gained converts and thus eroded the traditional power structure of the island, Niuluki became less keen on the newcomers. When Niuluki's own son asked to be baptised, the king issued an edict that the missionaries cease their activities. On 28 April 1841 a band of warriors, probably condoned by Niuluki, attacked Pierre Chanel and killed him.

Despite this (or perhaps because of it) the island soon became fully Catholic as other Marist priests took up the challenge.

Pierre Chanel was declared venerable in 1857, beatified in 1889 and finally canonised as the patron saint of Oceania in 1954. He is also recognised as the first martyr to lay his life down for Oceania (Rev John Williams had been dead two years at this stage, but he was a Protestant – and that doesn't count).

on Futuna (where there are two kings ruling two separate kingdoms) but the power structure on Wallis is suffering.

King (*Lavelua*) Tomasi Kulimoetoke, who has been in power for over 35 years, has become too powerful and now, even though the other *aliki* families want him out, he has instilled his own family too strategically to be sacked. Match this with the introduction of satellite TV which, since 2001, has opened Wallisian eyes to the wonders of the Western world, and you have a recipe for upheaval. Today there are two opposing groups: the reformist *aliki* who want to oust the king and head towards the future, and the old king, backed by the lower classes who hope that things will return to how they were before.

The conflict in Wallis has not left Futuna unscathed. Only accessible via air from Wallis, Futuna becomes completely isolated from the world when flights are cut, as they often become in times of political turmoil on Wallis or in the event of cyclones and tropical depressions. In March 2006 Futuna sent a delegation to Paris (the largest it has sent since the islands became a French territory in 1961) to ask that flights from Futuna to both New Caledonia and Fiji become possible.

Lifestyle

On Futuna, you can still see the men meeting nightly in *fale fono* (village halls), dressed in *pareu* (a sarong-style garment) and having a cup of kava or three with their mates. The days are hot and quiet, usually marked by

working in the taro fields, fishing and napping, while early evening is an active time for playing rugby and *kirikiti* (the local game of cricket). Most people still live in traditional *fale*, which are oblong, open aired structures with woven roofs. Nowadays, some families keep a modern house but most still will sleep in their cool and breezy *fale*.

It's rare to see traditional *fale* on Wallis (except for in the village of Vailala) and kava drinking has been replaced almost entirely with beer drinking. Still, the lifestyle roots itself in family and tradition; people do not socialise much outside of their own extended families.

Population

The islands have a population of approximately 14,944: 10,071 on Wallis and 4873 on Futuna, but there is an even larger population living overseas. It's estimated over 20,000 Wallisians and Futunans live in New Caledonia.

As well as the indigenous population, about 800 expats, mainly French, live on Wallis and 100 on Futuna.

RELIGION

Wallis and Futuna is very Catholic. A Sunday church service, usually at around 7am, is well worth going along to: lots of colour, lots of flowers and wonderful singing.

A huge number of often impressively large churches are found round the two islands, and even uninhabited Alofi and the small islands around the Wallis lagoon have chapels and oratories.

Because of the strong religious devotion, dress in the islands is very conservative: both sexes keep their legs covered to the knees and women's dress is usually an ankle-length *pareu* with a matching loose-fitting blouse that reaches the elbows.

ARTS

Beautiful tapa (cloth made from the bark of mulberry and breadfruit trees) featuring traditional motifs is produced on both islands. Futuna tapa, called *siapo*, is marked with predominantly geometric patterns whereas Wallis tapa, known as *gatu*, depicts land-and-sea designs (see p57).

Majestically large *tano'a*, the multilegged wooden bowls used for making kava, are carved on Futuna. Local woodcarving artists of note include Mika Initia, Suve Suva and Soane Hoatau.

The year's big event is on the eve of 14 July when a competition is held involving traditional dancers from several villages. The ancient *soamako* (war dances) are particularly impressive.

LANGUAGE

Virtually no English is spoken on Wallis and even less on Futuna, so being able to speak some French really helps.

Reflecting the historical connections of the islands, Wallisian is very similar to Tongan, and Futunan is similar to Samoan. See Language in the Samoa (p483) and Tonga

(p691) chapters for pronunciation tips, and Language in New Caledonia (p309) for French basics.

Wallisian basics

Hello (in the morning).	<i>Malo te ma'uli.</i>
Hello (later).	<i>Malo te kataki.</i>
Goodbye (to someone who is leaving).	<i>'Alu la.</i>
Goodbye (if you are leaving).	<i>Nofo la.</i>
How are you?	<i>'E lelei pe?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Ei, 'e lelei pe.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Malo te ofa.</i>
Yes.	<i>Ei.</i>
No.	<i>Oho.</i>

Futunan basics

Hello (in the morning).	<i>Malo le ma'uli.</i>
Hello (later).	<i>Malo le kataki.</i>
Goodbye (to someone who is leaving).	<i>'Ano la.</i>
Goodbye (if you are leaving).	<i>Nofo la.</i>
How are you?	<i>E ke malie fa'i?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Lo, e kau malie fa'i.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Malo.</i>
Yes.	<i>Lo.</i>
No.	<i>E'ai.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

The group consists of three major islands and about 20 islets, approximately 300km west of Samoa and 600km northeast of Fiji.

Wallis is a strikingly flat volcanic creation highlighted by several crater lakes. The highest bump on the landscape is Mt Lulu Fakahega (145m). Wallis' shallow lagoon can only be entered by one of four passes, the Honikulu Pass. About 15 small islets – some volcanic stumps, others classic sandy *motu* (islands) – are dotted around the lagoon.

Futuna and neighbouring Alofi lie 230km to the southwest of Wallis. The result of geological upheavals, they're much more mountainous than Wallis. Futuna's highest point is Mt Puke (524m); on Alofi it's Mt Kolofau (417m). Fringing reefs embrace both islands while in places the mountainous interior plunges straight into the sea.

Both Wallis and Futuna sit close to the meeting point of the Pacific and the Indo-Australian continental plates and are subject to earthquake activity, most recently in the disastrous quake of 1993.

Deforestation has left only a fraction of the original forests intact (15% on Wallis, 30%

on Futuna), but many of the once deforested areas are now covered by secondary growth or agricultural plantations, so it's hard to tell that deforestation has occurred at all. The problem is not due to international logging concerns but more to the use of wood as the main fuel source. The deforested, steep slopes of Futuna are particularly prone to erosion, and increased run-off poses a threat to coral reefs and vital fisheries. On Alofi most of the tropical jungle still stands.

WALLIS ISLAND

pop 10,071 / area 77.9 sq km

The island of Wallis is no particular stunner by Polynesian standards. It's a big, flat jungle with a web of roads and not much in the way of attractive architecture or beaches. What makes this destination exceptional is its island-dotted, Eden-like lagoon where each islet offers a new experience. Add a fascinating, traditional culture in the midst of change, some crater lakes and extensive archaeological sites still waiting to be excavated, and you'll find it easy to become enamoured of this unusual place.

WALLIS IN...

Two Days

Your first day in Wallis should be spent exploring by car. You'll need a local to show you to the hard-to-find **To'oga Toto** (p816) and **Talietumu** (p816) archaeological sites, and **Lanutavake** (p816) and **Lalolalo** (p816) crater lakes. Finish the day with sunset views from **Mt Lulu Fakahega** (opposite) and dinner at **Chez Patricia** (p817). The next day can be leisurely spent on the northern islets of **Nukufotu** (p816) and **Nukulooa** (p816) visiting the bird nesting grounds, hiking and swimming.

Four Days

Take an excursion, either diving or picnicking around the southern islets with **Evasion Bleue** (p816). Your last day should be spent **snorkelling** (p816) with the rays and turtles around the eastern islets.

INFORMATION

Banque de Wallis et Futuna (☎ 72 09 71; Fenuarama shopping centre, Mata'Utu; ⌚ 8am–11.30am & 1.30–4pm Mon–Fri)

Gendarmerie (☎ 72 29 17; Mata'Utu) Police.

Hospital de Sia (☎ 72 07 00; Mata'Utu)

K Prim (Uvea Sharp shopping centre, Mata'Utu; ⌚ 7.30–11.30am & 2–5pm Mon–Fri) Internet and coffee. The shopping centre is on the road towards the Fenuarama shopping centre.

Papeterie de Fenua (☎ 72 12 94; Fenuarama shopping centre) Good selection of books.

Post office (☎ 72 08 00; Mata'Utu; ⌚ 7.30am–3.30pm Mon–Thu, 7.30am–1.30pm Fri)

Wallis Voyage (☎ 72 27 87; fax 72 27 28) A travel agency across from Hôtel Lomipeau.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aircalin (☎ 72 00 00) is the only airline serving Wallis and Futuna.

BOAT

There is no regular passenger transport by sea.

Getting Around

There's no public transport on Wallis so it's a case of rent wheels or walk.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Hihifo airport is 6km from Mata'Utu. Hotels offer transfers for 1500 CFP each way but if you are stuck someone will offer you a ride.

BOAT

Taxi boats to the southern islets are available from Halalo through **Foto Fenua** (☎ 72 12 37) for 1000 to 2000 CFP return.

In Vailala, ask around for Vitolio (no phone); he can drop you off at Nukufotu then pick you up again according to the tides for 1000 CFP.

CAR

Car hire costs around 8000 CFP per day; there are no scooters or bicycles for rent on Wallis. Unless otherwise noted, all rental agencies are in Mata'Utu.

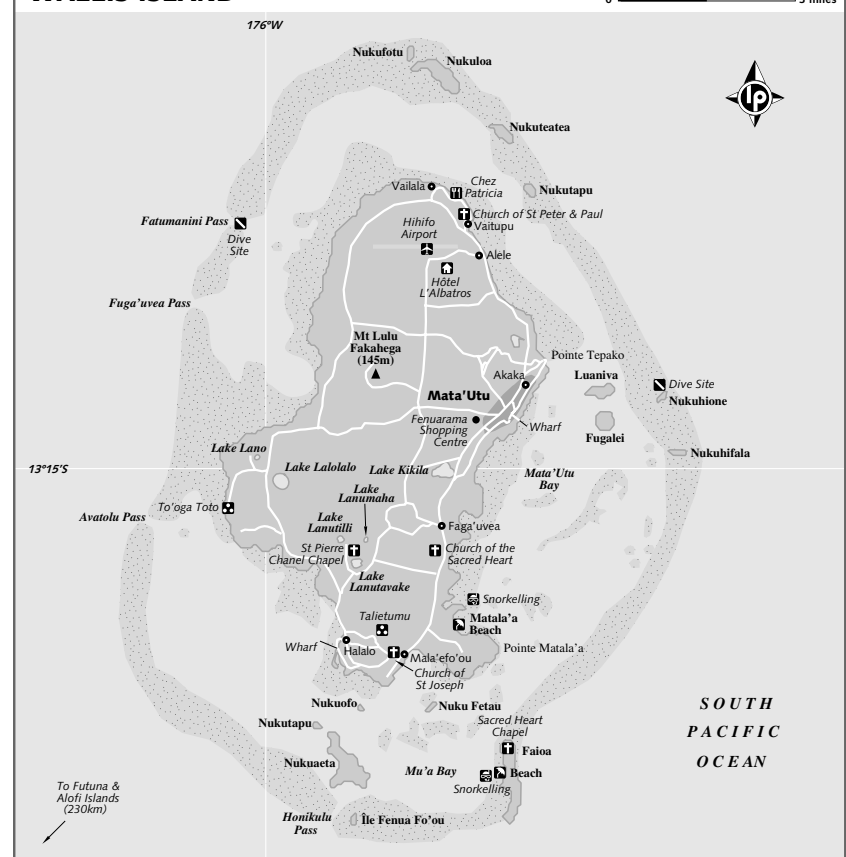
Multi Service (☎ 72 27 52; Hihifo airport)

Pacific Auto Location (☎ 72 28 32; fax 72 29 33)

Pacific Dihn Motoka (☎ 72 26 57)

Plaisir du Fenua (☎ 72 02 27)

WALLIS ISLAND



MATA'UTU

pop 1300

Mata'Utu is the country's sprawling administrative and business centre – it's a long walk from anywhere to anywhere. Due to the heat, humidity and lack of walking paths, you'll find less people walking in Mata'Utu than in LA. There are no street names, and no tourist information source.

The waterfront is dominated by **Our Lady of Good Hope Cathedral**, looking across the open green to the lagoon. The Maltese cross centred between the two towers is the royal insignia of Wallis. The adjacent **King's Palace**, with its two-storey verandas running all the way around, almost looks like an Australian country residence.

Across from the King's Palace is the post office, while the gendarmerie and the Uvea and Fenuarama shopping centres are straight up the road inland about 500m, 1km and 1.5km respectively.

AROUND THE ISLAND

For a good look over the whole island, head for **Mt Lulu Fakahega** (145m). You can drive to the top, where there's a small abandoned chapel. Footpaths meander down to the west coast road from the summit.

The 35km island-circuit road is unsealed and at times fairly rough. It never actually runs along the coast although in a few places there are detours that run along the water's edge.

In Mala'efo'ou, the **Church of St Joseph** is the oldest church on the island. It has a beautiful interior covered in a kaleidoscope of decorations. Many of them are inspired by traditional land-and-sea tapa designs. Other impressively grand churches can be found in nearly every village.

An unmarked side road leads to the impressive **Taletumu** archaeological site. This huge and beautifully restored site was a fortified Tongan settlement, dating from around AD 1450. The fortress wall apparently runs for several kilometres in each direction although much of it has been destroyed and other parts engulfed by the jungle. The stone paved roads in and around the site were used only by the king, whose feet were not allowed to touch the ground.

In the southwest of the island, the striking, lush **Lake Lanutavake** lies just off the road.

Lake Lalolalo is the most spectacular of the Wallis crater lakes. The eerie lake is an almost perfect circle, with sheer rocky cliffs falling 30m down to the inky, 80m-deep lake waters. Tropical birds are often seen gliding effortlessly across the lake and it is tabu to clear the jungle here, making this some of the best preserved primary forest on the island. It's said that the American forces dumped equipment into the lake at the end of WWII.

Back along the coast is **To'oga Toto**, an immense, nearly hidden ruin of a Tongan fort. The name is translated as 'the blood of Tongans', referring to bloody battles that were fought here; an alternative name for the area is the *marais sanglant* or 'swamp of blood', since the marshy water reflects a red hue through the many tropical chestnut trees here. It's a trek to get here and another to tramp through all the vines and jungle to actually see the site, but it's worth it if only to find the scattered shards of Lapita pottery (see p39) in the stone-paved king's path.

Continue to the northern end of the island to the tranquil coastal villages of **Vailala**.

AROUND THE LAGOON

The calm, turquoise waters and impressive variety of islets of Wallis' lagoon are as much a reason to visit this island as the sights of the interior. In the south, **Faioa** probably has the finest beaches, while **Ile Fenua Fo'ou** (more commonly referred to as 'the pass') has

plenty of *fale* camping space. Spend the day fishing, snorkelling or just lounging on the beach of crystalline sands, then be swept to sleep by one of the world's most spectacular night skies. Don't forget to bring plenty of fresh water, though, since there's none on the islet. Just opposite, **Nukuaeta** is the only islet with fresh water and was once a leper colony. The unique flora of this small island make this a fascinating place to visit.

In the north, the Unesco-protected **Nukufotu** is a nesting ground for marine birds and you can walk from here to the neighbouring islet of **Nukuloa**. Climb up the high rocks for breathtaking views of the lagoon.

The islets to the east offer the best **snorkelling** and are frequented by turtles and rays.

ACTIVITIES

Te U Hauhaulele (☎ 72 12 37), the diving club of Wallis, can arrange dives. The president changes yearly so there is no fixed phone but you can contact Foto Fenua on the number provided to get the newest phone number.

Evasion Bleue (☎ 72 12 37; wallis-&-futuna.islands.com) is an ambitious project, in formation at the time of writing, that will incorporate a dive centre (including lake and night dives), taxi-boat service, lagoon excursions and special weekend 'Wallisian culture' trips where visitors can live a traditional Wallisian lifestyle on an islet in the lagoon.

WALLIS FOR CHILDREN

Anywhere out on islets of the lagoon is a fantastic adventure for kids. There is no end of sandy beaches, warm water and colourful fish.

L'Association de Vakalā (☎ 72 29 67; gins.p@wallis.co.nc; boat rental/class 2000/4000 CFP) is a sailing school near Akaka, but visitors can stop by and join in or rent a kayak to boat out to the eastern *motu*. At the time of writing, the association was building an underwater garden of exploration, where kids and adults can snorkel around and read signs that label the different types of corals and other sites of interest.

SLEEPING

Hôtel Lomipeau (☎ 72 20 21; hotel.lomipeau@wallis.co.nc; s/d/tr 10,500/11,500/13,000 CFP; ☞ ☞) Centrally located in Mata'Utu, this standard hotel-style place has great views of the lagoon but the funny noises coming from

the old plumbing pipes might keep you awake.

Hôtel Moana Ho'ou (☎ 72 21 35; fax 72 21 35; s/d 8500/9500 CFP; ☞ ☞) On the water in Mata'Utu, this is a quieter option.

Hôtel L'Albatros (☎ 72 20 99; fax 72 18 27; s/d 12,750/16,000 CFP; ☞ ☞) It's near the airport but away from Mata'Utu and the bungalows are clean and plain.

EATING & DRINKING

Aside from the few restaurants, simple snack bars dot the island. There's a supermarket in the Fenuarama shopping complex.

Chez Patricia (☎ 72 21 38; mains 1500-1900 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner) A waterfront, out-of-the-way spot in Vailala, this place decorated in Wallisian style is a stylish choice for a great meal.

Le Récif (☎ 72 20 21; mains 1850-2350 CFP; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place at Hôtel Lomipeau has an extensive menu, good service and a bright setting but it's overpriced for the small portions.

La Terrasse de Liku (☎ 72 27 37; mains 2000-2500 CFP; ☞ lunch & dinner) It's near town and on the waterfront but is in need of some fresh, local ingredients.

FUTUNA & ALOFI

Futuna: pop 4873 / area 64 sq km

Alofi: pop 0 / area 51 sq km

Sweet, flower-scented Futuna embraces its visitors with sumptuous jungles, sparkling beaches and a very intact traditional culture. There is absolutely no tourist infrastructure out here so, unless you know someone, getting around ranges from the impossible to the extremely expensive. You'll need to stay awhile to crack this place open, but once you do you may never want to leave. It's divided into two kingdoms, Alo and Sigave, which nowadays live in peaceful if not competitive harmony with each other.

Uninhabited Alofi, with its tropical forest and beach, is a piece of paradise. A strait less than 2km wide separates the two islands.

LEAVA

pop 950

Everything of note is concentrated in Leava, Futuna's major centre, on the south coast. There are a couple of supermarkets,

the island's administrative headquarters (there's even a library), and a wharf. It's all along one road so you can't get lost.

Information

Banque de Wallis et Futuna (☎ 72 36 40) Has very irregular opening hours and no ATM.

Gendarmerie (☎ 72 32 17; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 2-5pm)

Hôpital de Kaleveleva (☎ 72 33 29)

Internet (☎ 72 31 20; Somalama Park Hôtel) Offers Internet access to its guests.

Post office (☎ 72 08 00; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) The only public telephone on the island is here in Leava and you can buy phone cards inside.

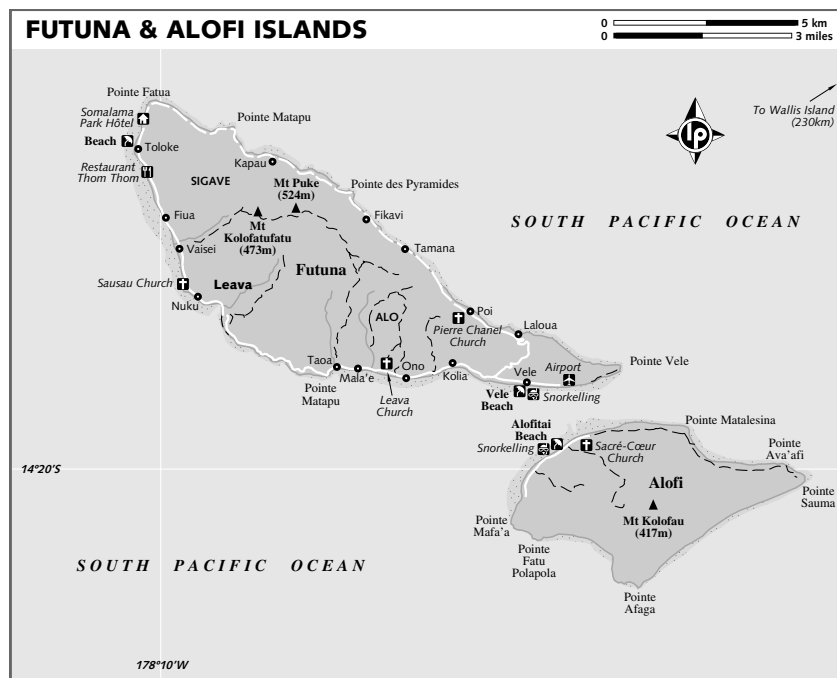
Sights

It's a 33km circuit around Futuna but with speed bumps on the good roads and potholes on the bad ones it'll take at least an hour and a half to go round. If you could get a hold of a mountain bike, this would be a fabulous ride. This route starts at Leava and goes counterclockwise.

Grand **Leava Church** has a fine ceiling with carved wooden men that support the rafters with an outstretched arm; if you look closely, you'll notice that each little man is completely unique. Like much Futuna carving, the woodwork was done using a chainsaw.

The road leads up to a plateau with fantastic views over a forest of coconut palms and fruit trees and out to the idyllic shores of Alofi. Continuing to the descent to the eastern side of the island, the view gets even better with the rolling jungle, crystal coastline and **traditional fale villages**. Passing the first of many quiet villages of beautifully constructed traditional houses, you reach the famous, towering **Pierre Chanel church** (called Petelo Sanele in Futunan). The exterior is in need of a new coat of paint, but the interior, which has enough pews to seat several hundred worshippers, is painstakingly decorated throughout with white and brown tapa. The chapel includes relics of the saint, including some of his clothes and the war club said to have dispatched him. There is a large wooden statue of Chanel that welcomes you at the door.

After the village of Poi, the sealed road ends and it gets pretty bumpy until Pointe Fatua in the north of the island. There's an uninhabited stretch from Fikave to Kapau



where you'll pass the lava rock formations of **Pointe des Pyramides** and it's about here that you start to pray to St Chanel that your rent-a-wreck doesn't break down. The paved road begins again right before Somalama Park Hôtel.

Heading south back towards Leava, **Sausau Church** is a colourful, three-towered confection that would fit right in at Disneyland. It was built in just eight months after its predecessor was destroyed in the catastrophic 1993 earthquake.

No road crosses the interior, but there is a network of footpaths winding up into the central hills. With enough time you might even find a way up **Mt Puke** (524m).

Boats run across to uninhabited **Alofi** from Vele beach, beside the airport (4000 CFP for the whole boat, 15 minutes). Alofi has an idyllic beach, clear water and plenty of shady trees, and people often come from Futuna to tend gardens and check on their pigs. There's a series of open, solar-powered *fale* for overnight accommodation but people usually just stay for the day. Alofi even has a small **church** – Sacré Coeur.

Activities

The *pensions* (guesthouses) claim that they offer excursions, but getting them to actually take you on one can be a real chore. There is good snorkelling off the back of the reef, but waves and currents can make this dangerous.

Sleeping & Eating

The two hotels on Futuna both have excellent bar-restaurants.

Hôtel Fiafia (☎ 72 32 45; fax 72 35 56; d incl breakfast with shared/private bathroom 7000/9000 CFP; ♿) Right in Leava, the rooms here are nicer than at Somalama but the setting leaves much to be desired. The owner sometimes offers free island tours, and airport transfers are free.

Restaurant Thom Thom (☎ 72 30 67; mains 1300-2500 CFP; ♿ lunch & dinner) French, Caribbean and South American cuisine mingle with local ingredients at this excellent beachside restaurant run by a well-travelled chef.

Futuna's shops and supermarkets are stocked with an amazing but expensive variety of imported goods. Snack bars come and go.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Somalama Park Hôtel (☎ 72 32 20; somalama@wallis.co.nc; s/d incl breakfast 10,500/11,500 CFP; ♿) Located on the north-west tip of Futuna, this place has a hacienda feel and looks out over a lovely beach. Getting anywhere from here can be difficult but you might not want to leave. Don't miss a chance to dine at the exceptional outdoor Chinese restaurant while being serenaded by the sounds of the sea.

Getting There & Around

Aircalin (☎ 72 00 05) flies to/from Wallis twice daily five days a week. Futuna's grass airstrip is 12.5km from Leava.

The two hotels can arrange car hire, which is an exorbitant 4000/8000 CFP for a half-/full-day plus 75 CFP per kilometre for a dilapidated Suzuki. Finding a bicycle to hire is near impossible.

WALLIS & FUTUNA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The few hotels are rarely full. Nevertheless, booking ahead secures you a room, but, equally important, it means you get picked up at the airport (1500 CFP).

All the hotels are comfortable with air-con and private bathrooms, but are impersonal and have no particular style. Prices range from 7000 CFP for a single room to 15,000 CFP for a two-person bungalow; a French-style breakfast is included. The exceedingly polite and formal service you'll find everywhere is a bit disorienting for such a wild and natural destination.

ACTIVITIES

The lagoon is the place to be for nearly every activity on Wallis (see p816), while there are a few hiking opportunities on Futuna (see opposite). Especially on Wallis, if you ask around, you should be able to find a local to take you out fishing.

Snorkellers should head for the reef fringes, the best being around the eastern islets of Wallis, Vele beach on Futuna and around the lagoon on Alofi.

Golf is played on a six-hole course on Wallis, although by playing the same holes in different directions they manage to make it feel bigger – at the time of writing the course was closed to nonmembers.

French or not, one of the most popular sports on Wallis is *kirikiti*, the Polynesian version of cricket. See the boxed text, p481.

BUSINESS HOURS

Shops are open Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 11.30am and 1.30pm to 5pm, and many open at weekends, but they tend to shut for a long, lazy lunch.

CHILDREN

Wallis and Futuna is very family oriented and you'll fit right in if you have children. The stores are well stocked with baby supplies although they are quite expensive.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

There are no overseas diplomatic representatives and since Wallis and Futuna is a French territory, French embassies abroad represent the islands.

PRACTICALITIES

- The only local newspaper, *Fenua*, was banished by the king in 2002 for publishing true but incriminating information about the royal family. Occasional newspapers from New Caledonia and magazines from France (all somewhat outdated) are available in supermarkets but there is nothing available in English.
- RFO (Reseau France Outre-mer), the French global radio and TV network, operates a 24-hour local radio station and one TV channel which broadcasts from 6am to around midnight; satellite TV is becoming widely available.
- The video system is SECAM.
- Wallis and Futuna electricity is 220V, 50Hz AC, with two round-pronged plugs.
- Weights and measures are metric. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Most holidays and festivals are the French dates also celebrated in New Caledonia and Tahiti and French Polynesia (see p670). In addition, 29 July commemorates the day when Wallis and Futuna became a French territory; St Pierre Chanel Day is 28 April.

INTERNET ACCESS

There's an Internet café, K Prim, in the Fenuarama shopping complex in Mata'Utu. On Futuna guests can use the terminal at Somalama Park Hôtel.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Wallis and Futuna's official site (www.wallis.co.nc) is for Francophones only.

MONEY

As in Tahiti & French Polynesia and New Caledonia, the Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP) is the local currency, tied to the euro. For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. It's wise to bring some CFP with you – there's no bank at the Wallis airport.

The Banque de Wallis et Futuna (BWF) branch in Fenuarama shopping centre in Mata'Utu can advance cash to Visa and MasterCard holders. It will change foreign currency but exacts a horrific 1000 CFP commission on each travellers cheque exchange.

Credit cards are accepted in most hotels and at car-hire agencies but not in most shops.

HOW MUCH?

- **Pareu:** 3500 CFP
- **Shell necklace:** 300 CFP
- **Imported pear:** 100 CFP
- **Kava bowl:** 10,000 CFP
- **Tapa handbag:** 6000 CFP

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 135 CFP
- **1L bottled water:** 200 CFP
- **Bottle of Foster's lager:** 240 CFP
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 1200 CFP
- **1kg of mangoes:** 300 CFP

ATMs

The country's only ATM is at the BWF branch at the Fenuarama shopping centre. It tends to run out of cash Friday night and doesn't get refilled till Monday morning.

Tipping

There's no need to tip and your server might not understand the gesture.

TELEPHONE Mobile Phones

For the time being this country is a cellular-free zone.

Phonecards

Public phones require a telecard (1000, 3000 or 5000 CFP) which can be bought at post offices. In Futuna the only public phone is outside the post office in Leava. On Wallis there are several cardphones including one at the Hôtel Lomipeau and at the post office in Mata'Utu.

TIME

Wallis and Futuna is just west of the International Date Line and 12 hours ahead of GMT.

VISAS

Visa regulations are the same as for France's other Pacific territories; see Embassies & Consulates in the Tahiti & French Polynesia (p670) or New Caledonia (p349) chapters for diplomatic representation.

TRANSPORT IN WALLIS & FUTUNA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Aircalin (www.aircalin.nc in French) flies three times a week to/from New Caledonia (52,000/60,000 CFP return fare in low/high season); two of the flights return to Noumea (New Caledonia) via Nadi in Fiji. For local Aircalin contact details, see opposite.

None of the South Pacific air passes include Wallis and Futuna.

Sea

There are no regular ferries nor cruise ships docking.

Yachts are not inclined to visit Wallis that often, despite its welcoming lagoon. Because there is not much room around the Mata'Utu wharf, yachts are encouraged to moor near the petroleum wharf at Halalo in the south of Wallis.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Aircalin (☎ Wallis 72 00 00, Futuna 72 32 04; www.aircalin.nc in French) flies between the islands twice a day, five days a week (from 24,800 CFP return). It is best to book in advance. Check the website for the latest schedules.

Boat

Transfers to the islets of Wallis are available from 1000 to 2000 CFP return but are subject to island time and the tides. See p814 for more details. Contact local fishermen to

get a lift to Alofi from Futuna (4000 CFP return). See p818 for more details.

Car

There is no public transport on either of the islands; if you want to get anywhere you had better rent a car (around 8000 CFP/day). On Futuna renting a car is an out-of-someone's house affair; no-one will ask for a driving permit or have considered any insurance issues. On Wallis things are more professional and you will need to show your permit (any kind will do) and ask about insurance, as it varies from agency to agency. On both islands, driving is on the right-hand side and there are no enforced rules of the road. For agency details, see p814 for Wallis and p819 for Futuna.

No-one hires out motorcycles, scooters or bicycles.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'

South Pacific Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	822
Activities	824
Business Hours	826
Children	826
Climate Charts	827
Dangers & Annoyances	827
Disabled Travellers	828
Embassies & Consulates	828
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	829
Holidays	829
Insurance	829
Internet Access	829
Money	830
Post	832
Telephone	832
Time	833
Tourist Information	833
Visas	833
Work	834

This guide has two types of Directories: the South Pacific Directory and individual country directories. The South Pacific Directory is a comprehensive resource for the whole region. The country directories appear at the end of each country chapter and round up specific details relevant to that country. Some subjects are covered in both directories (eg accommodation options in the region are given in this directory, but specific accommodation prices are covered in the country directories.) When seeking information, consult both directories and note the cross-references.

ACCOMMODATION

From no-frills *fales* (houses) to luxury resorts, the Pacific has these and the whole spectrum in between. That said, not all countries cover all budgets: some places are top-heavy with top-end options but offer few budget choices, while other countries can't muster a single five-star joint. These differences often all boil down to the state of the country's tourist industry: if it's thriving, like in Fiji or French Polynesia for example, there will be something for everyone; in

countries where tourism hasn't taken hold, you can kiss choice goodbye. To find out what's offered where, plus detailed prices, check Accommodation in the individual country directories.

Accommodation listings in this guide have been divided into three price categories (budget, midrange and top end) and then ordered by author preference. Leading each section are the places our authors recommend the most. Depending on the country, budget accommodation may include camping grounds, homestays, hostels and cheap hotels. Midrange options range from hotels and motels to guesthouses and fully furnished houses for weekly rental. Hotels and resorts dominate the top-end options but keep in mind the word 'resort' is loosely applied in some countries and is not always synonymous with luxury.

Accommodation is often fully booked and may be more expensive during peak tourist times; for more information see When to Go (p28). A few countries, such as Tokelau, Pitcairn Island and theoretically the Cook Islands, require accommodation to be booked before arrival, but most don't. In the more expensive countries, such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, pre-booked package tours that include accommodation are well worth investigating. See p840 for more details.

Camping

Self-sufficient, outdoorsy type? Good. You'll need to be when you're camping in the South Pacific. Forget amenities blocks with hot and cold running water, games rooms, flick-a-switch cooking facilities and the oh-so-essential on-site convenience store. You'll be lucky to find one or two like that in the whole huge region. Here we're talking coconut palms, thatched shelters, coconut palms, pit toilets, coconut palms, camp-fire rocks, and that's about it except for the buzz of mozzies and, inevitably, a long slice of heavenly beach. In a few countries, an occasional hotel will allow you to pitch your tent.

Camping is an excellent way to save precious francs in expensive Tahiti or New Caledonia. However, not many countries

cater for campers; the only other places with facilities are Easter Island, Fiji, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu. In one or two countries, camping is even discouraged as it is not customary (Tonga is also one of these countries). Check the individual country chapters for more information.

If you want to camp somewhere other than a designated camping area (and that means secluded, seemingly deserted beaches), it's important to seek permission from customary land owners before pitching your tent. In many cultures, camping near a village can cast shame on the villagers for failing to invite the strangers into their homes, hence the reason it's discouraged in some places. If you do camp out, try to leave no trace of your visit; carry out everything you carry in.

Homestays

In the odd event you don't get invited to stay with a family, don't immediately blame your armpits or unshaven legs. Experience village life by simply booking a homestay. This form of accommodation has taken off in some countries in recent years, and it offers a fab alternative to the gloss of hotels or resorts. Think of it as the Pacific's simple version of a bed and breakfast, though here you may have to take all meals with your hosts, not just breakfast. Reserve homestays in advance (either directly or through the local tourist office), and keep your expectations at ground level – a thatched hut with mats or mattresses on the floor, a pit toilet and cold shower are as flash as some come. Homestays have been listed throughout this guide; see Accommodation in the individual country directories for prices and details.

Hostels

Backpackers beware! Rustling up your own dinner and bunking down in a cheap hostel dorm is not much of an option in the pricey Pacific. Many countries offer no hostels, or one at the very most (eg New Caledonia). The exceptions to this gloomy situation are Fiji and the Cook Islands where it's more than possible to do a hostel hop. French Polynesia also has hostel-style digs on its larger islands. The Pacific's sole hostel affiliated with **Hostelling International** (www.hihostels.com) is in New Caledonia. The following websites are a good resource for hostellers:

Hostel Planet (www.hostelplanet.com)
Hostels.com (www.hostels.com)
Hostelz (www.hostelz.com)

Hotels

Hotels in this guide cover all budgets. What you get for what you pay is determined by the country: lower those expectations for the more expensive destinations (like French Polynesia and New Caledonia), and revel in the 'extras' that may materialise in cheaper countries (eg Fiji).

Cheap hotels offer very basic rooms, and may have dorm facilities as well. In some countries, the budget end of the spectrum is bolstered by motels and guesthouses. Motels generally supply rooms with a kitchenette – a fabulous money-saving device, especially for families or a bunch of backpackers. The term 'guesthouse' is used in several countries but it's variously defined: expect anything from a hostel to a midrange hotel. Many budget-end accommodation options will not accept credit cards.

Midrange and top-end hotels generally offer those little luxuries you've come to expect: air-con, tea- and coffee-making facilities, a restaurant, bar and the mandatory swimming pool. The latter tend to range in size from postage stamp to mini-Pacific; if pool size is going to make or break your holiday, regard publicity shots in brochures with scepticism and ask for measurements. Hotels may offer garden and beachfront bungalows, or a room in the main building; check all the prices as they often differ. Increasingly, hotels in this range can be contacted and booked via websites, and most accept credit cards.

Rental Accommodation

Rentals can be good for families or groups of travellers who want to stay in one place for at least a week. They are not necessarily the cheapest option, though you'll be able to save on meals by shopping locally and making good use of the kitchen. That said, rentals are not that easy to come by in the Pacific – Rarotonga (p450) is your best bet.

Resorts

If you've ever wanted to spoil yourself rotten, a top-end resort in the Pacific is about as good as it gets. Idyllic over-the-water

bungalows lapped by azure waters, glass-bottomed coffee tables that double as an ever-changing looking glass into the underwater world, white-sand beaches that you may have to yourself...these are the type of luxuries that tip the scale for many travellers. French Polynesia is often regarded as the best of the best (see the boxed text, p583), but if that's just a tad too pricey, options abound in other countries.

Getting hitched is another reason to consider a resort. More and more couples are choosing the Pacific for their wedding and honeymoon; see the boxed text, below.

Pacific resorts are a wide and varied lot. If you're after specifics, like the features just mentioned, do some investigations: quiz travel agents, ring resorts, study this guide and the Internet. Depending on the country, resorts located on the mainland may offer better facilities in terms of entertainment, dining, and tours while those on off-shore islands usually have better beaches. In the end, the choice boils down to what you *really* want: a resort offering loads of things to keep you busy, or one on a palm-fringed speck in the ocean that has little more than divine décor and a secluded beach.

Needless to say, resorts are almost always much cheaper if prebooked before you leave home as a package tour including meals, airfares and airport transfers (see p840). Walk-in rates are often over the top.

Staying in Villages

The Pacific islands are famous for their hospitality, and in many countries it is almost inevitable that you will get an invite home. Revel in this first-hand experience of local

culture and lifestyle. But remember too that such invitations confer a degree of honour on the host family – staying with a family shouldn't be viewed as a cheap form of accommodation. Even the most welcome guest will eventually strain a family's resources. They may never kick you out or even hint that you should leave, but after a few days it may be more considerate to move on. When leaving, make sure you express your gratitude. Gather the family, offer thanks with a short speech, and present a gift. Don't call it 'payment' or it may be refused. It may well be refused anyway, but do your best to leave it behind. Cash will not always be accepted, but kava, alcohol or shop goods (such as canned meat) may be. And if you're looking for a home for that toy kangaroo or stuffed kiwi that's stashed in your bag, this is the moment to bid it a fond farewell.

ACTIVITIES

What the Pacific islands lack in landmass, they make up for in water. It's hardly surprising then that water junkies come here en masse – scuba diving, snorkelling, surfing, swimming, sea kayaking and sailing are all key activities – and then there's fishing. If pruned fingers and wet feet are not you, get stuck into some serious whale watching or hiking. Depending on your destination, other activities include cycling, horse riding, abseiling (p347), bird-watching (p259) and caving (p726), not to mention visiting archaeological or sacred sites and WWII relics.

In the devoutly Christian Pacific, many countries effectively close down on Sunday and many activities are not appropriate.

'I DO', THE PACIFIC WAY

If you want to do it in an outrigger canoe, on the rim of a volcano, on a private island or simply underwater...the Pacific caters for all types when it comes to getting married. Some couples prefer a historic chapel, others engage a local choir, and there are those who just want to exchange vows on a sublime stretch of blonde beach.

French Polynesia, Fiji and Vanuatu are the big three in the marriage and honeymoon market. Loads of resorts in these countries offer wedding packages and will happily make all the arrangements for you; alternatively DIY but ensure you have all the necessary documents (a marriage licence for starters). Either way, the following websites are well worth checking: www.fijiweddings.com, www.vanuatuweddings.com or <http://destination-weddings-abroad.com>. If nothing but top-notch will do, take a look at the resorts listed in the boxed text on p583. And don't forget to seriously consider the weather when planning (see When to Go, p28) – your beloved won't even hear that special 'I Do' if it's said bracing an umbrella in cyclonic conditions.

Rules are often relaxed in cities accustomed to the heathen ways of tourists and at resorts (so spending the day at a resort is one way to escape the Sunday blues). Another Sunday option is to join in: attend an island church and listen to the beautiful singing.

Diving

The Pacific is paradise for scuba divers. 'Surreal Scuba' (p36) in the Itinerary chapter is an appetiser; for full details on dive sites, conditions, centres and courses, see the South Pacific Diving chapter (p69). Dive shop details are listed in the individual country chapters.

Fishing

The South Pacific lures anglers with sport fishing and excellent big-game fishing. Common catches include yellowfin and skipjack tuna, wahoo, barracuda, sailfish, and blue, black and striped marlin. For something out of the ordinary, in Kiribati you can try a bit of bonefishing (p261), or in Niue flying-fish fishing (see the boxed text, p363).

For more information on fishing opportunities, see the following chapters: Marshall Islands (p282), New Caledonia (p348), Palau (p401), Rarotonga & Cook Islands (p444), Samoa (p512), Solomon Islands (p573), Tonga (p726) and Vanuatu (p805).

Hiking

Although a hike from one side of the island to the other may be a matter of minutes on small coral atolls, on the higher Pacific islands there are opportunities to walk through magnificent forest and even climb live volcanoes. Many tracks cross land under customary ownership, so ask around before heading off; you may need to get permission and possibly pay a small fee. In some cases it may be wise to hire the services of a local guide.

Countries that offer substantial hiking opportunities are Fiji (p210), French Polynesia (p668), New Caledonia (p348), Samoa (p512) and Tonga (p726). To whet your appetite further, see the itinerary 'Land Ahoy' (p36).

Bushwalking in the heat has the potential to be a truly miserable experience. Undertake long walks in the cooler parts of the year; check the Climate & When to Go

SURFING

Modern surfers will identify with James Cook's observations of a Tahitian surfer in 1777: 'I could not help concluding that this man felt the most supreme pleasure while he was driven on so fast and so smoothly by the sea.'

Frustrated surfers may also be interested to learn an ancient Hawaiian chant used to make the surf rise:

Kumai! Kumai!

Ka nalu nui mai Kahiki mai

(Arise! Arise!

You great surfs from Tahiti)

section in the individual country chapters. Take plenty of water with you.

Sailing

See p842 for information about taking your own yacht to the Pacific or getting a berth on someone else's. Yacht clubs are a good first port of call for information about renting a yacht. For details of yacht clubs and yacht rentals in the individual country chapters, check under Boat in the Getting Around sections and under Activities in the Directory section. French Polynesia is an excellent place to rent a yacht; see p669.

Surfing

The sport of board surfing was invented first by the sea-loving cultures of Polynesia. The first recorded observations of surfing on a board come from Hawai'i and Tahiti in the 1770s. Some 200 years later the Pacific is still popular among surfers. Apart from the most famous beaches in Hawai'i, surfers flock to French Polynesia (p668) and Fiji (p210). The Solomon Islands (p574) has a fledgling industry, and surfing in Samoa (p513) is now also on the map.

Surfing over coral reefs is obviously dangerous and should only be attempted at high tide. As always, local knowledge is the best guide regarding both safety and where the best waves are to be found.

Water Sports

Snorkelling is a great introduction to the underwater world and there's no shortage of places to try it out. In some places it's possible to rent a mask, snorkel and flippers,

but there's no beating the freedom of having your own equipment. For more details see Activities in the Directory of the individual country chapters.

Sea kayaking is popular, and kayak tours are offered in a handful of countries, including Fiji (p210), Palau (p406), Tonga (p716) and Samoa (p496).

Some countries also offer opportunities to windsurf and jet ski.

Whale Watching

Humpback whales spend much of the second half of the year in Pacific waters, and several countries offer excellent opportunities to view and even swim with them. Tonga is unquestionably the best place for this experience; see p717 as well as the boxed text on p718. Another place to take a dive with whales is Rurutu (p663) in French Polynesia. New Caledonia (p349) and the Cook Islands (p446) also have whale-watching opportunities.

BUSINESS HOURS

Opening hours in the Pacific are fairly fluid and, for this reason, we haven't been too pedantic about listing them in this book. Banks generally have quite conservative hours; 9.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday is average but, depending on the country, they may close even earlier. A few banks open on Saturday morning, but the majority don't. In general, businesses and government offices open from 9am to 4pm or 5pm; however, in countries with French ties (New Caledonia and French Polynesia, for example), they get going as early as 7.30am. Many businesses shut for an hour at lunch time; make this two hours in those French-connection countries. Small shops often trade from early morning to well into the evening. For more detailed information on standard opening hours, see Business Hours in the individual country directories. And keep in mind that, throughout the guide, reviews won't list business hours unless they differ from the standard hours.

CHILDREN

Those wee'ns will love it! Sandy beaches, swimming, snorkelling, scaling coconut trees...what kid doesn't love hanging out in bathers all day and working up an appetite big enough to break any budget? The

climate, natural setting, aquatic games and relative lack of poisonous creatures are a boon for youngsters of all ages. However, apart from major destinations such as Fiji, which is well set up for children, few travellers tote tots anywhere in the Pacific. In fact, some resorts and hotels ban little people for all or part of the year, so check when booking. Ask about kids' discounts on everything from accommodation (some resorts take kids for free) to air fares.

Children are highly valued in Pacific cultures. Locals will often be keen to talk to your kids, play with them and invite them to join activities or visit homes. However, local kids are expected to behave, so try (ha!) to curb your child's crying and tantrums if visiting a village. Childcare is a shared responsibility in the Pacific, and locals will sometimes correct your children for you if they misbehave!

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* has useful information for travel with children anywhere in the world.

Practicalities

Before leaving home, update vaccinations (p845) and don't forget to pack your child's health records. Ensure that your health and travel insurance also covers your child. Bring plenty of high UV-protection sunscreen (it's essential in the tropics), a hat and light clothes that cover the whole body. It's important to keep small children well hydrated in a hot climate. Gastrolite helps prevent dehydration and also masks unpleasant tastes in the water. If your child is sensitive to the local water, boil drinking water or buy bottled water. Also see the Medical Checklist (p846) for more on what to bring from home.

If you're travelling with kids small enough to be carried in a backpack or baby-sling, this is the way to go. A small stroller may *occasionally* be useful, but you'll have to weigh this up with its nuisance value – a pain on crowded public buses and it'll rust if taken to the beach.

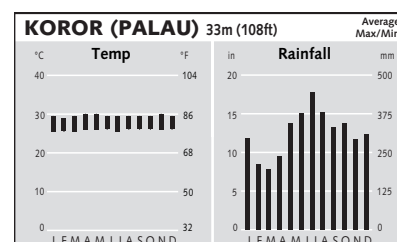
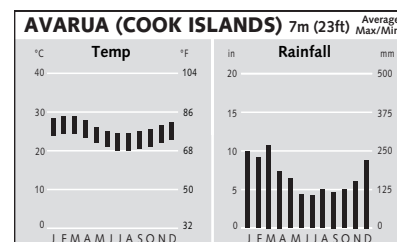
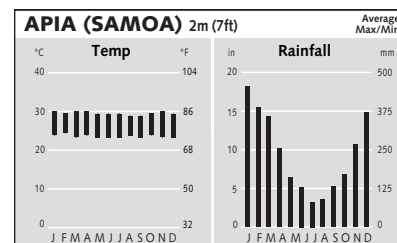
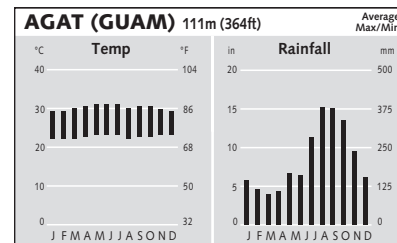
Smaller towns and outer islands may have few resources for Westerners wanting to pamper their kids. You will usually be able to buy disposable nappies (diapers), infant formula, long-life milk etc in the main town, but don't leave the capital without buying everything you need or checking the local situation.

Supervision is essential, especially when swimming, snorkelling or playing on beaches. Make sure kids understand that touching coral is a no-no (see the boxed text, p851).

For more on travelling with children, see Children in the Directory of the individual country chapters.

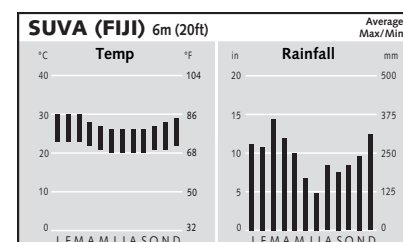
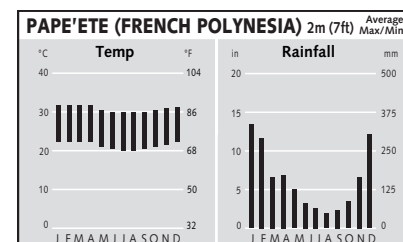
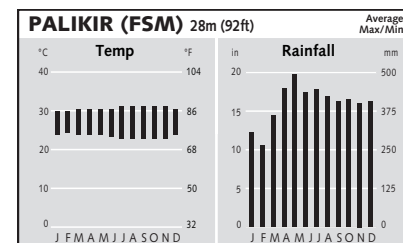
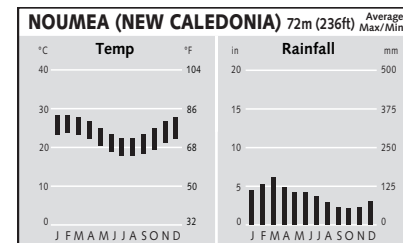
CLIMATE CHARTS

Consult the following charts while you're planning your trip.



DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The Pacific islands are safer than many places in the world, but common sense is still necessary. In general, most Pacific islands are as idyllic as their tourist-brochure depiction, and the people are some of the friendliest you will ever meet. As anywhere, crime does exist, but with minimal caution you should have no problems. In some of the Pacific's larger cities there has been an increase of assaults, so be aware



when walking around at night, even as a couple. See Women Travellers in the Directory of individual countries for hassles that women may encounter.

In some areas at peak season, the sheer number of tourists can be a nuisance, but you can hardly complain about that when you're one of them.

Mosquitoes

Even in places where mosquito-borne malaria is not a risk, the bites of mosquitoes can still cause considerable discomfort and, in some cases, dengue fever (p849). They are less of a problem around the coast where sea breezes keep them away, but inland they can be a pest. For more information see the boxed text, p848.

Marine Hazards

The safest ocean swimming is within the protected waters of lagoons. However, when swimming or snorkelling, be aware of tides and currents, and particularly of the swift movement of water out of a lagoon and through a pass into the open sea. Avoid swimming alone, seek local advice about the conditions and stay alert for venomous marine life (see the boxed text, p851).

Attacks by sharks are rare but not unknown in Pacific waters. It's wise to seek the advice of local people before diving in. Swimming inside a reef offers some protection from sharks but if you are approached, stay calm (as calm as possible, anyway) and swim steadily away.

Theft

Like the European explorers before you, you might run into different attitudes to personal property while in the Pacific. You'll also sympathise with Cook's dilemma: it can be difficult to stay Zen about another culture's attitude to property when someone has just run off with the ship's sextant!

The most important things to guard are your passport, papers, tickets and money – in that order. Carry these with you at all times in a money belt or in a sturdy leather pouch on your belt. Belongings are normally safe in hotel rooms but bear in mind that privacy is far from a sacred right in the Pacific. Many Pacific cultures have a relaxed attitude to property. It's best not to

leave expensive gear lying around in homes unless you share that relaxed attitude.

And remember what happened to Captain Cook. Don't let your overreaction to the threat of stealing spoil your holiday.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Most Pacific nations have very poor facilities for disabled travellers. Getting around can be a real problem for wheelchair users: small domestic aeroplanes have narrow doors and shipping services may not have ramp access. What's more, hotels and guesthouses are not used to receiving guests with a physical disability; Western resorts and hotels are more likely to have some facilities.

On the other hand, disabled people are simply part of the community in the Pacific, looked after if necessary but expected to play a useful role. You won't have people pretending you don't exist; where a Sydney taxi cab might just accelerate away, a Samoan bus driver will call someone over to help him carry you aboard.

For pretrip planning advice, consult the Health & Safety link under www.lonelyplanet.com/travellinks. Also get in touch with your national support organisation (preferably the 'travel officer' if there is one) and inquire about the countries you plan to visit.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

See the individual country directories for the addresses of embassies and consulates.

As a tourist, it's vitally important to realise what your own embassy – the embassy of the country of which you are a citizen – can and can't do. Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies if the trouble you're in is remotely your own fault. Remember that you are bound by the laws of the country you are in. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. For example, if you need to get home urgently, a free ticket home is exceedingly unlikely as the embassy would expect you to have insurance. If all your money and documents are stolen,

it might assist with getting a new passport, but a loan for onward travel is usually out of the question.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Pacific attitudes to homosexuality are complex. Pacific cultures are conservative, and some more enthusiastic religious leaders occasionally whip themselves into a frenzy about homosexuality. However, in Polynesia at least, there is an ancient tradition of male 'cross-dressing', which is usually, but not always, associated with homosexuality. See the boxed texts on p690 and p585 for more information.

This guide lists contact addresses and venues under Gay & Lesbian Travellers in the Directory of the individual countries. That said, there is very little in the way of clubs or other facilities for gays and lesbians in the region; the exception is Tahiti (p671).

Male homosexuality is technically illegal (although this is rarely enforced) in many Pacific countries, including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and Tuvalu. Female homosexuality only gets an official mention in Samoa, where it is also illegal. In the more liberal French colonies of New Caledonia and French Polynesia, homosexuality is legal. Excessive public displays of both heterosexual and homosexual affection are frowned upon in most Pacific societies.

HOLIDAYS

The standard Western holidays are observed in the Pacific islands. For extra national holidays, check Festivals & Events in the Directory of the individual country chapters.

Easter includes Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday. Many Catholic countries observe the Ascension 40 days after Easter Sunday; Whit Sunday (Pentecost) is seven weeks after Easter. The Assumption is celebrated on 15 August.

The US-influenced nations may celebrate Martin Luther King Day, US Independence Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day and Thanksgiving. French territories celebrate Labour Day, Bastille Day, All Saints' Day and Armistice Day. It's strange to listen to children on the other side of the world to France practising *La Marseillaise*

for 14 July, with its stirringly militaristic lines about fertilising our fields with impure blood! Countries associated with New Zealand (NZ) and Australia often celebrate Anzac Day.

If a public holiday falls on a weekend, the holiday is often taken on the preceding Friday or following Monday.

The following is a list of some standard Western public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Martin Luther King Day Third Monday in January

Easter March/April

Anzac Day 25 April

Labour Day 1 May

Whit Sunday & Monday May/June (Pentecost)

US Independence Day 4 July

Bastille Day 14 July

Assumption Day 15 August

Columbus Day 2nd Monday in October

All Saints' Day 1 November

Veterans' (Armistice) Day 11 November

Thanksgiving Fourth Thursday in November

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. There are a wide variety of policies available; those handled by STA Travel and other student travel organisations are usually good value. See the Health chapter (p845) for details on medical insurance.

Some policies exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling, and even hiking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies. See p843 for more details on car and motorcycle insurance.

INTERNET ACCESS

The major international Internet service providers (ISPs), such as **AOL** (www.aol.com), **CompuServe** (www.compuserve.com), and **IBM Net** (www.ibm.com), have few dial-in nodes in the South Pacific. This means it really isn't feasible to take a portable computer on holiday with you in order to stay in touch with life back home. You're better off relying on Internet cafés and other public access points – hotels, resorts, hostels, post offices, Telecom offices, libraries or universities – to collect your electronic mail. See the Directory of the individual country

chapters for information about Internet access in that country. For interesting websites to check before leaving home, see p31; see also Internet Resources in the individual directories.

MONEY

The Pacific is not Western Europe where a single currency (almost) rules. Here a variety of currencies exists – everything from vatu in Vanuatu to tala in Samoa. That said, about half the countries in the Pacific do not have their own currency; instead they use US, Australian or NZ dollars, or the Pacific franc (the Cour de Franc Pacifique). The countries you'll be visiting will determine which of these four currencies you'll need to take; if you're travelling through a handful of countries, you may need more than one. See Money in the individual country directories to find out which currencies operate where.

To get an idea of exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page. The Getting Started chapter (p29) gives a rundown on local costs.

ATMs & Credit Cards

Getting money out from your home bank account via ATMs is probably the best way to access cash in many Pacific countries. If you're not familiar with the options, ask your bank to explain the workings of credit, credit/debit, debit, charge and cash cards.

Two major advantages of credit cards are that they allow you to pay for expensive items (eg airline tickets) without having to carry wads of cash around, and they give you the best exchange rate (often lower than the advertised rate) on purchases. They also allow you to withdraw cash at selected banks or from the many ATMs that are linked up internationally. However, if an ATM in the Pacific swallows a card that was issued outside the Pacific, it can be a major headache. Also, some credit cards aren't hooked up to ATM networks unless you specifically ask your bank to do this. ATMs are common in major Pacific centres, but unknown in the outer islands or rural areas.

Cash cards, which you use at home to withdraw money directly from your bank account or savings account, can be used in

the Pacific at ATMs linked to international networks like Cirrus and Maestro.

Credit and credit/debit cards, such as Visa (sometimes called Carte Bleue) and MasterCard, are widely accepted. However, these cards often have a credit limit that is too low to cover major expenses like airline tickets and can be difficult to replace if lost abroad. Also, a cash advance against your Visa or MasterCard credit card account incurs a transaction fee and/or finance charge. With some issuers, the fees can reach as high as US\$10, *plus* interest per transaction, so it's best to check with your card issuer before leaving home and compare rates.

Charge cards such as American Express (Amex) have offices in many countries that will replace a lost card within 24 hours. However, Amex offices in this part of the Pacific are limited to Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and NZ. Charge cards are not widely accepted off the beaten track.

Another option is Visa TravelMoney, a prepaid travel card that gives 24-hour access to your funds in local currency via Visa ATMs. The card is pin-protected and its value is stored on the system, not on the card. So if you lose your card, your money's safe.

The best advice is not to put all your eggs in one basket. If you want to rely heavily on bits of plastic, go for two different cards – an Amex along with a Visa or MasterCard. Better still is a combination of credit or cash card and travellers cheques so you have something to fall back on if an ATM swallows your card or the banks in the area are closed.

A word of warning: fraudulent shopkeepers have been known to quickly make several charge slip imprints with your credit card when you're not looking, and then simply copy your signature from the one that you authorise. Try not to let your card out of sight, and always check your statements upon your return.

Cash

Nothing beats cash for convenience...or risk. If you lose it, it's gone forever and very few travel insurers will come to your rescue. Those that will, limit the amount to somewhere around US\$300.

For tips on carrying your money safely, see Theft (p828).

Moneychangers

Every time you change money, you lose out through commissions and customer exchange rates, so if you only visit American Samoa, for example, buy US dollars before travelling from your bank at home (if it can provide them).

All Pacific currencies are fully convertible, but you may have trouble exchanging some of the lesser-known ones at small banks, while currencies of countries with high inflation face unfavourable exchange rates. Get rid of any leftover Pacific currencies before you leave the region as no bank outside the Pacific will touch them.

Most airports and big hotels have banking facilities that are open outside normal office hours, sometimes on a 24-hour basis. Post offices often perform banking tasks and outnumber banks in remote places; they also tend to have extended hours of operation. Be aware, though, that while they always exchange cash, they might balk at handling travellers cheques.

The best exchange rates are offered at banks. Exchange bureaux usually – but not always – offer worse rates or charge higher commissions. Hotels are almost always the worst places for exchanging money. American Express and Thomas Cook usually don't charge a commission for changing their own cheques, but may offer a less favourable rate than banks.

Tipping & Bargaining

Attitudes to tipping vary in the Pacific but in general, tipping is not expected and in some cases it may cause offence. It's far better to keep your 'tip' to a smile of thanks. In Melanesian societies, a tip is a gift that creates an obligation that the receiver must reciprocate, and they can't do this if you're passing through. Tipping is becoming more common in cities like American Samoa's Pago Pago or French Polynesia's Pape'ete.

The Pacific is not Asia; bargaining is not the practice in any Pacific country and it may also offend. Although bargaining is becoming more common in the tourist shops of major cities, village people will often take their produce back home from market rather than accept a lower price than what's

asked. The exception to all this is Fiji where Indo-Fijians, as part of their culture, expect to bargain and will initiate it.

Occasionally, people in isolated areas will quote you grossly inflated prices for artefacts or accommodation, usually because they are not up to date with prices. When this happens, explain that you can't afford that much and then tell them what it would cost in the city. If they don't accept it, you'll have to either pay the first price or try elsewhere.

Travellers Cheques

The main reason for carrying travellers cheques rather than cash is the protection they offer from theft, though they are losing popularity as more travellers deposit their money in their bank at home and withdraw it as they go along through ATMs.

American Express and Thomas Cook travellers cheques are widely accepted and have efficient replacement policies. If you're going to remote places, stick to American Express, since small local banks may not accept other brands.

When you change cheques, don't look at just the exchange rate; ask about fees and commissions as well. There may be a service fee per cheque, a flat transaction fee or a percentage of the total amount irrespective of the number of cheques. Some banks charge fees (often exorbitant) to change cheques and not cash; others do the reverse.

Keep a record of cheque numbers; without them, replacement of lost cheques will be a slow and painful process. Many institutions charge a per-cheque fee, so most of your cheques should be in large denominations, say US\$100. It's only at the end of your stay that you might want to change a US\$10 or US\$20 cheque just to get through the last day or two.

Value-Added Tax

Value-added tax (VAT), known as TVA (*taxe sur la valeur ajoutée*) in French-speaking countries, is levied in some Pacific nations such as French Polynesia, New Caledonia, the Cook Islands and Fiji. It's generally added to goods and services, including hotel and restaurant bills, and can significantly bump up prices you may be quoted. Throughout this guide, all prices listed include VAT unless otherwise stated.

POST

Postage costs vary from country to country, as does post office efficiency: the 'slowest post' award must go to Pitcairn Island – expect three months for letters either way.

You can collect mail at poste restante counters at major post offices. Ask people writing to you to print your name and underline your surname. Then mark the envelope 'Poste Restante (General Delivery)' with the name of the city and country. When collecting mail, your passport may be required for identification and a fee may be charged. Check under your first name as well as your surname. Post offices usually hold letters for a month.

If you're arriving by yacht, letters should have the name of the vessel included somewhere in the address. Mail is normally filed under the name of the vessel rather than by surname.

TELEPHONE Mobile Phones

In some South Pacific countries, it's feasible to take a mobile phone on holiday; see the individual country chapters for more information on how you can get mobile phone coverage.

Phone Codes

For international calls, you can dial directly from most countries in the South Pacific to almost anywhere in the world. This is usually cheaper than going through the operator. To call abroad you simply dial the international access code (IAC) for the country you are calling from (most commonly 00 in the Pacific, but see the following table), the international telephone code (ITC) for the country you are calling (also see the following table), the local area code (if there is one, and usually dropping the leading zero if there is one) and then the number. If, for example, you are in the Cook Islands (IAC 00) and want to make a call to the US (ITC 1), San Francisco (area code 415), number 123 4567, then you dial 00-1-212-123 4567. To call from Fiji (IAC 05) to Australia (ITC 61), Sydney (area code 02), number 1234 5678, then you dial 05-61-2-1234 5678 (dropping the zero from Sydney's area code). There are no area codes in any of the countries of the South Pacific.

TELEPHONE CODES

Country	ITC (☎)	IAC (☎)
American Samoa	684	00
Cook Islands	682	00
Easter Island	56-32	00
Federated States of Micronesia	691	011
Fiji	679	05
French Polynesia	689	00
Guam	1-671	011
Hawai'i	1-808	011
Kiribati	686	00
Marshall Islands	692	011
Nauru	674	00
New Caledonia	687	00
Niue	683	00
Northern Marianas	1-670	011
Palau	680	011
Pitcairn Island	872	00
Samoa	685	00
Solomon Islands	677	00
Tokelau	690	00
Tonga	676	00
Tuvalu	688	00
Vanuatu	678	00
Wallis & Futuna	681	19

ITC – International Telephone Code (to call into that country)

IAC – International Access Code (to call internationally from that country)

Other country codes include: Australia ☎ 61, Canada ☎ 1, France ☎ 33, Germany ☎ 49, Hong Kong ☎ 852, Indonesia ☎ 62, Japan ☎ 81, Malaysia ☎ 60, New Zealand ☎ 64, Papua New Guinea ☎ 675, Singapore ☎ 65, South Africa ☎ 27, UK ☎ 44, USA ☎ 1.

Phonecards

Depending on the individual country, public telephones can be a rarity but it's usually not too hard to find a shop owner who will let you use their phone for a local call. Some top-end hotels charge pretty steeply for the privilege of using their phones. Phonecards are used in various Pacific countries – even Pitcairn Island, with just one public telephone, has its own phonecards. See Telephone in the Directory of the individual countries for more details.

TIME

Local time relative to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT, which is the same as UTC) is specified in the Practicalities boxed text in the Directory of each individual country chapter; see also the World Time Zones map (p883). Since this is the tropics, most Pacific islands don't use daylight saving time (summer time); the exceptions are Vanuatu and Pitcairn Island. It is well worth checking your airline tickets and itinerary very carefully if a country on your route is either starting or finishing daylight saving.

Time zones in the Pacific are complicated by the International Date Line, which splits the region in half. Crossing from east to the west, you go forward one day. The Date Line runs along the 180-degree longitude, detouring 800km to the east around Fiji and Tonga, and 3600km to the east to accommodate all of Kiribati in one day.

Times that are valid at midday in Fiji:

Country	Time
American Samoa	1pm, previous day
Cook Islands	2pm, previous day
Easter Island	6pm, previous day
Federated States of Micronesia's Chuuk & Yap	10am, same day
Federated States of Micronesia's Kosrae	midday, same day
Federated States of Micronesia's Pohnpei	11am, same day
Gambier Archipelago	3pm, previous day
Hawai'i	2pm, previous day
Kiribati's Gilbert Islands	midday, same day
Kiribati's Line Islands	2pm, same day
Kiribati's Phoenix Islands	1pm, same day
Marquesas Islands	2.30pm, previous day
Marshall Islands	midday, same day
Nauru	midday, same day
New Caledonia	11am, same day
Niue	1pm, previous day
Northern Mariana Islands	10am, same day
Pitcairn Island	3.30pm, previous day
Samoa	1pm, previous day
Society Islands including Tahiti	2pm, previous day
Solomon Islands	11am, same day
Tokelau	2pm, previous day
Tonga	1pm, same day
Tuvalu	midday, same day
Vanuatu	11am, same day
Wallis & Futuna	midday, same day

Some international hours at the same time:

Country	Time
Berlin	1am, same day
London	midnight, same day
Los Angeles	4pm, previous day
New Zealand	midday, same day
New York	7pm, previous day
Paris	1am, same day
Singapore	8am, same day
Sydney	10am, same day
Tokyo	9am, same day

Throughout the Pacific you'll hear such terms as 'Tongan time', 'Fijian time' or 'island time'. This could be translated to a wish for tourists to 'relax, it'll happen eventually'. The concept of time is a bit fluid in the tropics and you'll find it a lot less stressful to adopt the same relaxed approach. It's also worth building some flexibility into your plans; don't count on split-second transfers from bus to ferry, and if you need government approval for anything, be prepared to wait for it.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The quality and quantity of tourist information varies from one Pacific country to another. But thanks to the Internet, even the most remote islands, like Tokelau for example, now have websites to browse. See under Tourist Information in the Directory of the individual country chapters for more details.

The **South Pacific Tourism Organisation** (SPTO; ☎ 679-330 4177; www.spto.org) is an intergovernmental organisation that fosters regional cooperation in the development and promotion of tourism in the Pacific. The SPTO serves as a tourist office for a few countries; however, it doesn't offer a lot in the way of services to independent travellers.

VISAS

A visa is a stamp in your passport or on a separate piece of paper permitting you to enter the country in question and stay for a specified period of time. More often than not in the Pacific, you will get a visa or tourist permit at the airport or port on arrival, but not always; it's worth checking with the embassies or consulates of the countries

you plan to visit or with a reputable travel agent before travelling as visa requirements can change.

Most readers of this book will have very little to do with visas. With a valid passport, you should be able to visit most Pacific countries for up to three months, provided you have some sort of onward or return ticket and/or 'sufficient means of support' (ie money).

See the Visa section in the Directory of the individual chapters for more details.

WORK

Generally it's hard to get a work visa for Pacific countries. To find out the rules and regulations regarding work in a particular country, contact the relevant embassy, consulate or immigration office, or check their website.

Volunteer work is an excellent way to get to know a country but it's not an option for

the casual tourist: volunteer programmes require a serious and long-term commitment. Most organisations require volunteers to have tertiary qualifications or work experience in their particular field, and to hold residency in the organisation's base country. Volunteer organisations active in the Pacific region include:

Australian Volunteers International (☎ 03-9279 1788; www.ozvol.org.au; PO Box 350, Fitzroy, Vic 3065, Australia)

UN Volunteers (☎ 228-815 20 00; www.unv.org; Postfach 260 111, D-53153, Bonn, Germany)

US Peace Corps (☎ 1 800 424 8580; www.peacecorps.gov; 1111, 20th St NW, Washington DC 20526, USA)

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO; ☎ 020-8780 7200; www.vso.org.uk; 317 Putney Bridge Rd, London SW15 2PN, UK) There are also offices in Canada, Ireland and the Netherlands.

Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA; ☎ 04-472 5759; www.vsa.org.nz; PO Box 12-246, Wellington, New Zealand)

Transport in the South Pacific

CONTENTS

Getting There & Away	835
Air	835
Sea	840
Tours	840
Getting Around	840
Air	840
Boat	841
Local Transport	843
Tours	844

This chapter gives the nuts and bolts about getting to the South Pacific, as well as information related to getting around the region once you're there. For detailed, country-specific information, see the Transport section of the individual country chapters. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

AIR

Just getting to the South Pacific can be an expensive exercise. The relatively small number of travellers visiting this region means that airfares are generally high. The main gateways are the US, Australia, New Zealand (NZ) and Japan; large international airlines flying between these

countries link a number of South Pacific destinations. There are also many small local airlines that service only the Pacific region. For a list of the airlines that can get you into the region, see the following Airlines section. For a list of airlines that will get you around once you are in the region, see p841. Also check the Transport section of individual country chapters for specific schedule information.

Airlines

Air France (in France ☎ 08 20 82 08 20; www.airfrance.com) Flies from Paris to New Caledonia and Tahiti (French Polynesia), and from Japan to New Caledonia.

Air Nauru (☎ 674-625 3409; www.airnauru.com.au) As an interim measure since its last plane was repossessed in late 2005, the airline has been contracting an aircraft to run a weekly service between Brisbane (Australia), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Nauru and Tarawa (Kiribati). Check the Internet for updates.

Air New Zealand (in NZ ☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) Flies to most Pacific countries.

Air Niugini (☎ 675-327 3444; www.airniugini.com.pg) Connects Papua New Guinea with the Solomon Islands.

Air Pacific (☎ 679-672 0888; www.airpacific.com) Flies between Fiji, Japan, Australia, NZ and the US (Honolulu). It also flies to Kiribati, New Caledonia, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

Air Tahiti Nui (☎ 689-46 02 02; www.airtahitinui.com) Flies between Tahiti (French Polynesia), the US, France, Australia, NZ and Japan.

Air Vanuatu (☎ 678-23848; www.airvanuatu.com) Flies to Australia, NZ, Fiji, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands.

Aircalin (☎ 687-26 55 00; www.aircalin.nc) Flies from New Caledonia to Australia, NZ, Japan, Vanuatu, Fiji and French Polynesia. It is the only airline that flies to Wallis and Futuna.

All Nippon Airways (☎ 81-03-3490 8800; www.ana.co.jp) Flies from Japan to Guam.

Asiana Airlines (in South Korea ☎ 1588 8000; www.flyasiana.com) Flies from South Korea to the Northern Mariana Islands.

China Airlines (☎ 86-02-2715 1212; www.china-airlines.com) Flies from China to Guam.

Continental Airlines (in the US ☎ 1 800 231 0856; www.continental.com) Serves Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana Islands and Palau from the US, Australia, Indonesia (Bali), the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan.

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works, and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Far Eastern Air Transport (☎ 886-2-3393 5388; www.fat.com.tw) Flies from Taiwan to Palau.

Freedom Air (☎ 64-9-523 8686; www.freedomair.com) Flies from NZ to Fiji.

Hawaiian Airlines (in Hawai'i ☎ 808-838 3700; www.hawaiianair.com) Flies from the US to American Samoa and Tahiti (French Polynesia).

Japan Airlines (in Japan ☎ 0120 25 5931; www.jal.co.jp) Flies from Japan to Guam and French Polynesia.

Korean Air (☎ 850-2-2667 0386; www.koreanair.com) Flies from South Korea to Guam and Fiji.

LAN (☎ 56-2-526 2000; www.lan.com) Flies between Chile and French Polynesia, with stops at Easter Island.

Northwest Airlines (in the US ☎ 1 800 692 6955; www.nwa.com) Flies to Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands from the US and Japan.

Pacific Blue (☎ 61-7-3295 2284; www.flypacificblue.com) Offshoot of Virgin Blue flying from Australia and NZ to the Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu.

Phillipine Airlines (☎ 632-817 800; www.philippineairlines.com) Flies from the Philippines to Guam.

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 685-22172; www.polynesianairlines.com) A joint venture between Virgin Blue and the Samoan government. Flies from Samoa to American Samoa, Fiji, Niue and Tonga.

Polynesian Blue (☎ 685-22172; www.polynesianblue.com) Partnership between Virgin Blue and Polynesian Airlines. Flies from Australia and NZ to Samoa.

Qantas (in Australia ☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com) Code shares with some Pacific airlines, flying from Australia, NZ and the US to New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Tahiti (French Polynesia), Fiji and Samoa.

United (in the US ☎ 1 800 538 2929; www.united.com) Flies or code shares with Star Alliance partners from the US and Japan to the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Fiji, Guam and Samoa.

Tickets

Most destinations in the South Pacific are relatively expensive transportwise both to get to and to get around. Most of your travel will need to be planned in advance. Depending on where you're coming from, consider purchasing a round-the-world (RTW) ticket with stopovers in the Pacific; alternatively an air pass (see opposite) may be what you need to ease the cost of travel between countries.

In addition to traditional travel operators, there are agencies that specialise in diving tours and other activity-based tours. Their packages typically include flights and accommodation, plus any activity fees and tours.

For long-term travel there are plenty of discount tickets valid for 12 months, allowing multiple stopovers with open dates.

Use the fares quoted in this book as a guide only (all quoted fares are return). Applicable airport taxes are not included in the fares – and be warned that these taxes can quickly add up to hundreds of dollars. Under the different regions later in this section we give prices to get to the main centres in the South Pacific: Honolulu (Hawai'i), Pape'ete (French Polynesia), Nadi (Fiji), Sydney (Australia) and Auckland (NZ). From these cities, you will be able to pick up connecting flights to most destinations elsewhere in the region.

Full-time students and people under 26 who can show a valid International Student Identity Card (ISIC) have access to better deals than other travellers. The better deals may not always be cheaper fares but can include more flexibility to change flights and/or routes.

INTERCONTINENTAL TICKETS

Choose between RTW fares or Circle Pacific tickets to get you to and around the Pacific.

Round-the-World Tickets

Various airline alliances offer RTW tickets, which give travellers an almost endless variety of possible airline and destination combinations.

RTWs can be excellent value; expect to pay from US\$2500, A\$3000, €2000 or UK£1300. Star Alliance (a code-sharing group of airlines that includes Air NZ) and OneWorld (including Qantas) offer some of the best RTWs for the South Pacific region. The SkyTeam group (including Air France, Continental Airlines, Korean Air and Northwest Airlines) is particularly interesting for visiting some Micronesian destinations.

Fiji is the most popular destination for travellers on RTWs, but Micronesia, Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga and the Cook Islands can all be visited as part of a RTW.

Circle Pacific Tickets

Circle Pacific tickets are similar to a RTW ticket but are used for travel between countries in the Pacific Rim region only (ie the US, South Pacific, Southeast Asia, NZ and Australia). They are excellent value if you wish to combine your Pacific journey with a few destinations in, for example, Australasia or North America. As with RTW tickets,

there are advance-purchase restrictions as well as limits on how many stopovers you can make. Fares are mileage-based.

For an idea of price, you should expect to pay around US\$2800 for a fare which includes Los Angeles–Tahiti (Pape'ete)–Cook Islands (Rarotonga)–Fiji (Nadi)–Auckland–Brisbane–Singapore–Los Angeles.

AIR PASSES

Intercountry flights in the Pacific are prohibitively expensive. The only really workable way to travel to a handful of countries is by using an air pass. Fortunately, there are some excellent air passes taking in several South Pacific countries for a reduced price. Some passes are arranged by airlines, while others are put together by travel agents. Seating availability for heavily discounted fares can be quite limited, so book early. Note that most air passes have to be bought well in advance, and many must be purchased before travel to the South Pacific commences.

Asia AirPass

This SkyTeam pass (valid for two months; from US\$750 to US\$1400) allows travel to 21 countries in both Asia and the South Pacific via Seoul or Tokyo. Some of the destinations serviced are Fiji, Guam, Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana Islands and Palau. You can choose from three to six sectors.

The pass is available for purchase with either a SkyTeam RTW ticket or an intercontinental ticket on a SkyTeam carrier.

Boomerang

This Qantas pass can be used to travel between Australia, NZ and the southwest Pacific islands of Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. The pass is also valid on Air Pacific, Air Vanuatu and Polynesian Airlines flights. It costs from US\$260 per sector, depending on mileage. The pass is only available when you purchase a ticket to Australia, NZ, Fiji and Vanuatu and is not available to residents of Australia, NZ or the southwest Pacific countries listed earlier.

Circle South West Pacific

This pass allows travel from Australia's east coast to two or more islands in the southwest Pacific, including Samoa, Tonga, NZ, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji or New

Caledonia. Passes start at A\$850 (depending on which countries you visit). For an extra A\$200 to A\$500 (depending on the flight), you can add an extra country.

Travel must start and finish in Australia and must be completed within 28 days. Accommodation must be prebooked for the full period.

Island Explorer

With this Polynesian Airlines pass you can fly from NZ to Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Australia (Sydney) and either Fiji or Hawai'i. The 45-day pass is only available for departures from NZ. It costs NZ\$1799.

Océanie Pass

This Aircalin pass is available on Aircalin's network and is sold outside the South Pacific (not available also in Australia and NZ) to nonresident travellers. A minimum of two sectors (from US\$160 per sector) must be purchased prior to arrival in the region.

Polypass

Polynesian Airlines' Polypass is a cheap way to fly between Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, Fiji, Australia and NZ. It's good for 45 days (excluding the Christmas holiday period) and allows five stops in the Pacific. In the USA, this is sometimes called the Pacific Explorer Air Pass and costs upwards of US\$1100. Travel to Honolulu, Los Angeles and Tahiti can also be included for an additional amount.

The airline also offers various Polypacks, where travellers are given up to two months to complete an itinerary that includes several Pacific destinations (these cost from US\$1000); see the Polynesian Airlines website for more details. Note, however, that at the time of writing the future of these passes was in doubt due to the launch of the Polynesian Blue airline (a joint venture between Virgin Blue and the Samoan government), which is slated to take over most of Polynesian Airlines' international routes.

South Pacific Pass

Using the route network of Air NZ and its Star Alliance partners, this Air NZ pass allows travel to Fiji, New Caledonia, Rarotonga, Tahiti and Tonga. Fares range from NZ\$400 to NZ\$700, depending on the

countries you choose. A minimum of two sectors must be purchased.

This pass is not available to residents of NZ, Australia or any of the countries listed in the previous paragraph, and must be bought in conjunction with an international ticket.

Visit Micronesia

This Continental Airlines pass offers substantial savings over the normal fares in this region. It must be purchased outside Micronesia in conjunction with an international ticket to Guam on Continental. Travel starts in Guam and costs US\$400 to go to Saipan (Northern Marianas), Palau and Yap (FSM); US\$500 if you add on Chuuk (FSM); or US\$600 if you also add Pohnpei (FSM). The pass is valid for 30 days.

Visit South Pacific Pass

This pass offers discounted airfares (by up to 50%) on a wide variety of South Pacific routes. Nine airlines are involved and you can travel between Australia, NZ, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, Nauru, Niue, Samoa and French Polynesia. You can pretty much tailor-make your itinerary, so discuss options with a travel agent.

The pass costs US\$220 to US\$370 per sector (depending on the sector) and you must purchase a minimum of two sectors. Additional sectors can be bought at participating airline offices in the South Pacific. The pass must be bought in conjunction with an international air ticket from outside the region, and it isn't available to residents of Australia, NZ or any of the countries listed above.

ONLINE BOOKING AGENCIES

A selection of online booking agencies is listed here, together with the country or region in which the website is based.

Air Brokers International (www.airbrokers.com) USA.

CheapTickets (www.cheaptickets.com) USA.

ebookers.com (www.ebookers.com) UK, Continental Europe.

Expedia.ca (www.expedia.ca) Canada.

Expedia.com (www.expedia.com) USA, UK, France, Netherlands.

House of Travel (www.houseoftravel.co.nz) NZ.

JustFares (www.justfares.com) USA.

My Travel (www.mytravel.com) UK.

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com) USA.

travel.com.au (www.travel.com.au) Australia.

Travelocity.ca (www.travelocity.ca) Canada.

Webjet (www.webjet.com.au) Australia.

World Travellers' Club (www.around-the-world.com) USA.

Asia

Flying from Japan, there are direct flights to the FSM, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia and the Northern Mariana Islands. There are also direct flights from Taiwan to Palau, from China and the Philippines to Guam, and from South Korea to Fiji, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. From other Asian destinations, the easiest option is to fly to Australia or to NZ and connect there with onward flights to the South Pacific. Most Asian countries offer fairly competitive airfare deals; Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong are some of the best places to shop around for discount tickets.

JAPAN & KOREA

Recommended agencies in Japan include **STA Travel** (☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp) and **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com).

From Japan, return fares to Nadi are around ¥86,000 and to Guam are ¥45,000. Fares from South Korea to Fiji start from US\$1250.

Australasia

Despite its proximity to Australia and NZ, travel to the South Pacific from that region can be reasonably expensive. Generally there is not much variation between the low- and high-season fares except during Christmas holiday season when fares increase considerably.

The east coast of Australia (Brisbane and Sydney) has excellent connecting flights to Melanesia (Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia), while Auckland or Wellington in NZ have good connections to Polynesia (Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga and French Polynesia).

Australia's east coast and NZ are both included in the routing of several air passes (see p837).

AUSTRALIA

Quite a few travel offices specialise in discount air tickets. Some travel agents, particularly smaller ones, advertise cheap air fares in

the travel sections of weekend newspapers, such as the *Age* (in Melbourne) and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Hideaway Holidays (☎ 02-8799 2500; www.hideaway.com.au) is a Pacific travel specialist and comes highly recommended. Other travel agencies specialising in the Pacific include **Talpacific Holidays** (☎ 02-9262 6318; www.talpacific.com) and **Pacific Holidays** (☎ 02-9080 1600; www.pacificholidays.com.au).

Return fares to Fiji start from A\$500/800 in the low/high season, to French Polynesia A\$1200/1600 and to Vanuatu A\$500/800. As well consulting the big-name airlines such as Qantas and Air New Zealand, it's also worth checking out fares with Virgin's new Polynesian Blue.

NEW ZEALAND

The *New Zealand Herald* has a travel section in which travel agents advertise fares. Both **Talpacific Holidays** (☎ 09-914 8728; www.travelarrange.co.nz) and **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnewzealand.co.nz) offer a range of fares and packages from NZ to most South Pacific destinations.

Return fares to Fiji or Vanuatu start from NZ\$500/800 in the low/high season. To French Polynesia fares start from NZ\$1000/1300.

Europe

There are flights from most major cities to Los Angeles, Honolulu, Sydney or Auckland, from where there are connecting flights to the South Pacific. Frankfurt and London have the most flight options, but generally there is not much variation in fares between cities. Flights via Japan and South Korea are shorter but there are fewer Pacific connections from these two countries.

Considering how far the South Pacific is from Europe, a RTW ticket (see p836) could be the most economical way to get to the region. Low season for travel from Europe is from January to June and October to November. High season is July to September and during the Christmas and New Year period.

CONTINENTAL EUROPE

In the Netherlands, try **Wereldcontact** (☎ 0343 530 530; www.wereldcontact.nl) and **Pacific Island Travel** (☎ 020-626 13 25; www.pacificislandtravel.com) for flight/accommodation deals.

In Germany, **Adventure Travel** (☎ 0911 979 95 55; www.adventure-holidays.com) and **Art of Travel** (☎ 089-21 10 76-13; www.artoftravel.de, in German) specialise in South Pacific travel.

Recommended agencies in France include **OTU Voyages** (☎ 08 20 81 78 17; www.otu.fr) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr). **Ultramarina** (☎ 08 25 02 98 02; www.ultramarina.com) specialises in travel to the South Pacific.

From Paris and Frankfurt low season return fares to Pape'ete start from €1300, while fares to Nadi start from €1100. From major cities expect to pay around €900 for a return fare to Honolulu.

UK

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*.

Recommended travel agencies include: **All Ways Pacific** (☎ 01494 432747; www.all-ways.co.uk) **Trailfinders** (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk) **Travelbag** (☎ 0800 082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

From the UK, flights via Los Angeles are generally the easiest – and often the cheapest – option for travel to the South Pacific. Air New Zealand flights from London to Australia or NZ often allow for stopovers in the South Pacific. Flights from London via Seoul and Tokyo are another possibility.

Return fares from London to Nadi start from £800/1100 in the low/high season; to Pape'ete expect to pay around £1200/1500; to Honolulu, Sydney and Auckland fares start from £600.

North America

Los Angeles and Honolulu are the main gateway cities for travel between North America and the South Pacific. There are direct flights to the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Samoa, Guam, the Marshall Islands and Palau – as well as numerous flights to Australia and NZ – from where you can connect to other destinations in the Pacific. From Canada, most flights to the South Pacific will travel via Los Angeles and/or Honolulu.

Many of the air passes mentioned (p837) are excellent value for travellers from North America.

In general, June to August is the cheapest and November and December are the most expensive months to travel to the South Pacific.

CANADA

The *Toronto Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Montreal Gazette* and *Vancouver Sun* are good places to start looking for cheap fares. **Goway** (☎ 800 387 8850; www.goway.com) is a Toronto-based travel agency specialising in trips to the South Pacific.

Year-round fares to Honolulu are around C\$500 from Vancouver or C\$600 from Toronto. Fares from Vancouver to Nadi start from C\$1900/2500 in the low/high season, or C\$2200/2600 to Pape'ete. From Toronto and Ottawa, return low season fares to Nadi start from C\$2300 and C\$2700 to Pape'ete.

USA

Discount travel agencies in the US can be found through the Yellow Pages or major newspapers. The *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *San Francisco Examiner* and *Chicago Tribune* have weekly travel sections with ads and information.

Travel agents in the US who specialise in the South Pacific region include:

Newmans Vacations (☎ 800 342 1956; www.newmansvacations.com)

Pacific for Less (☎ 808 875 7589; www.pacific-for-less.com)

South Seas Adventures (☎ 800 576 7327; www.south-seas-adventures.com)

Year-round fares to Honolulu start from around US\$400 from Los Angeles and US\$650 from New York. From Los Angeles, low/high season fares start from US\$1000/1500 to Pape'ete and Nadi. From New York and other east coast cities, return low/high season fares start from US\$1400/1800 to Pape'ete and US\$1600/1900 to Nadi.

Air New Zealand flights from the US to Australia and NZ often include one free stopover in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti or Tonga. In the low/high season, expect to pay around US\$1500/1850 for a return fare to Auckland, including this stopover.

South America

LanChile operates flights between Santiago and Pape'ete; one flight a week has a stopover on Easter Island. For more information

on fares and schedules, contact LanChile or **Student Flight Centre** (☎ 02-335 0395; www.sertur.cl in Spanish) in Santiago, an affiliate of STA Travel. From Santiago, return fares to Pape'ete cost about US\$1500.

SEA

Within the South Pacific countries, inter-island shipping routes can be used to reach smaller islands that do not have an air service. Cruise ships provide an expensive way of reaching the major tourist destinations. Cargo vessels, some of which carry passengers, travel between island groups and the main Pacific-trading nations. Another option is to get to the South Pacific on your own yacht (or on someone else's). All of these options are detailed in the Getting Around section on opposite.

TOURS

Travel agents and airlines have a range of packages which are worth considering. Convenient and cost effective, packages often include flights, airport transfers, accommodation and possibly meals. They often work best for families, wedding parties and groups travelling together, however those going it alone and couples should also give them more than a cursory glance. Although not pushed by travel agents, it is possible to book a package and extend your stay with independent travel. Once your package of relative luxury ends, there's nothing stopping you from staying on in the South Pacific a while longer (usually a maximum of one month).

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Air travel is the primary way of getting around the South Pacific. As well as the major international airlines, there are many smaller airlines run by Pacific nations that make island hopping around the South Pacific not that difficult. Keep in mind though that some flights operate only once or twice per week and are often heavily booked. Many of the local airlines also operate a domestic service around their own country, providing access to the more remote parts of the region. Details on these domestic airlines and their flight schedules are given in the Transport section of individual country chapters.

Unlike in Europe or Africa, in the South Pacific you usually can't just decide which country you'd like to visit next and arrange travel on the spot – unless you have your own yacht! If, like most South Pacific tourists, you're travelling by plane, the only reasonable way to get to more than one or two countries is by buying an air pass. Otherwise, costs for intercountry flights will quickly break the bank. There are a number of international and domestic air passes available which can make things more affordable. See p837 for more information on international air passes that include regional routes.

Airlines in South Pacific

The following airlines (some international, some domestic) fly between several South Pacific countries. Check the Transport section of the individual country chapters for more detailed information on schedules and airfares.

Air Fiji (☎ 679-331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) Flies between Fiji and Tuvalu three times a week.

Air Nauru (www.airnauru.com.au) As an interim measure since its last plane was repossessed in late 2005, the airline has been contracting an aircraft to run a weekly service between Brisbane (Australia), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Nauru and Tarawa (Kiribati). Check the Internet for updates.

Air Pacific (☎ 679-672 0888; www.airpacific.com) Flies from Fiji to Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Air Vanuatu (☎ 678-23848; www.airvanuatu.com) Flies from Vanuatu to Fiji, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands.

Aircalin (☎ 687-26 55 00; www.aircalin.nc) Flies from New Caledonia to Fiji, French Polynesia, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.

Continental Airlines (in the US ☎ 1 800 231 0856; www.continental.com) Flies between Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Inter-Island Airways (☎ 684-699 5700; www.interislandair.com) Flies between American Samoa and Samoa.

Polynesian Airlines (☎ 685-22172; www.polynesianairlines.com) Flies from Samoa to American Samoa, Fiji, Niue and Tonga.

Solomon Airlines (☎ 667-20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au) Flies from the Solomon Islands to Vanuatu and Fiji.

BOAT

There's a certain romance in the idea of doing at least some of your travel around the Pacific by sea. It's much slower than flying, and usually not any cheaper – but if

you've got lots of books you want to read, or just a love of the ocean, this could be the route for you. For information about chartering a yacht or sailing on board a tall ship, see p842.

Cargo Ship & Ferry

Cargo and dual-purpose cargo/passenger ships ply between the following countries: Tuvalu and Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, Samoa and Tokelau, Kiribati and Tuvalu, and Kiribati and Fiji. There's also a car ferry operating between Samoa and American Samoa. See Getting There & Away in the Transport section of the individual country chapters for more detailed information on all of these services.

Getting to the South Pacific by cargo ship is not a done thing, but within the region a couple of islands, such as Pitcairn Island and Tokelau, rely on cargo ships for connection to the outside world. See the Getting There & Away section in those chapters for details. Travel agents don't book cargo-ship travel. You can either book through a freighter agent or directly with a shipping company.

Cruise Ship

Cruise ships will never be the cheapest, or the fastest way, from A to Z but they're not just about getting there. The facilities on board usually range from luxurious to even more luxurious. Cruise-ship fares vary enormously, but generally prices start at about US\$200 per day. Major port-of-calls are Noumea (New Caledonia), Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Pape'ete, Mo'orea and Bora Bora (all in French Polynesia). Out-of-the-way destinations include Pitcairn Island. Melanesian cruises usually depart from Australia's east coast. Other cruises depart from the US east coast, and Honolulu is another hub.

Travel agents, or the cruise companies themselves, need to be contacted well in advance if you are planning on taking a South Pacific cruise. A few companies include:

Crystal Cruises (www.crystalcruises.com)

Discovery World Cruises (www.discoveryworldcruises.com)

P&O (www.pocrises.com)

Phoenix Reisen Cruises (www.phoenixreisen.com)

Princess Cruises (www.princess.com)

ResidenSea (www.residensea.com)

Saga Cruises (www.sagacruises.com)

Yacht

Between May and October, the harbours of the South Pacific swarm with cruising yachts from around the world. If you have your own yacht, you've probably got the most flexible system of transport in the Pacific. Slightly less flexible options are chartering a yacht or joining the crew on someone else's yacht.

Almost invariably, yachts follow the favourable westerly winds from the Americas towards Asia, Australia or NZ.

Popular routes from the US west coast take in Hawai'i and Palmyra Atoll (p753) before following the traditional path through Samoa and American Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and NZ. From the Atlantic and Caribbean, yachties access this area via Panama, the Galápagos Islands, the Marquesas, the Society Islands and the Tuamotus. Possible stops include Suvarrow (northern Cook Islands), Rarotonga or Niue.

Because of the cyclone season, which begins in November, most yachties try to be on their way to NZ by the early part of that month.

The yachting community is quite friendly, especially toward those who display an interest in yachts and other things nautical. Yachties are a good source of information about world weather patterns, navigation and maritime geography. They're also worth approaching to ask about day charters, diving and sailing lessons.

CREWING

Often yachties are looking for crew, and for those who'd like a bit of low-key adventure, this is a great opportunity. Most of the time, crew members will only be asked to take a turn on watch; that is, scan the horizon for cargo ships, stray containers and the odd reef – and possibly to cook or clean up the boat. In port, crew may be required to dive and scrape the bottom, paint or make repairs. In most cases, sailing experience is not necessary and crew members can learn as they go. Most yachties charge crew around US\$15 per day for food and supplies.

If you'd like to enjoy some relative freedom of movement on a yacht, try to find one that has wind-vane steering; the tedious job of standing at the wheel staring at a compass all day and all night is likely to go to the crew members of the lowest status (that's you). Comfort is also greatly increased on yachts

RESPONSIBLE YACHTING

- Don't add to the unsightly (and ecologically hazardous) trash floating up on island beaches by allowing rubbish to fall into the sea, even if you are nowhere near an island. Rubbish can float a long way!
- Many harbours are fished for food. So unless you have holding tanks or on-board sewerage treatment, use on-shore toilet facilities when you are in harbour.
- Never anchor on coral, or allow your anchor to drag through live coral.
- When in public view, observe the local customs regarding dress. Don't lounge about the deck topless on Sunday, for example!

that have a furling jib, a dodger to keep out the weather, a toilet and shower.

Yachts rigged for racing are usually more manageable than simple liveaboards. As a general rule, about 3m of length for each person aboard affords relatively uncrowded conditions.

If you're trying to find a berth on someone else's yacht (or trying to find crew for your own boat) ask at local yacht clubs and look at noticeboards at marinas and yacht clubs. In the US, Honolulu and the west coast – San Francisco, Newport Beach and San Diego – are the places to start looking. Australia's northeastern seaboard is good and so are Auckland, Whangarei and the Bay of Islands in NZ. In the South Pacific, it shouldn't be too difficult to find crew or a yacht in Pape'ete, Pago Pago, Apia, Nuku'alofa, Noumea or Port Vila.

Some companies that organise sailing trips around the South Pacific are:

Ocean Voyages (www.oceanvoyages.com) Organises yacht charters in the South Pacific. It's possible to charter the whole boat or book a single berth on a yacht sailing a particular route. In some cases a charter could be about the only way to get to remote islands or atolls if you don't have your own yacht.

Søren Larsen (www.sorenlarsen.co.nz) This 45m tall ship sails from Auckland to various South Pacific countries between March and November. It's possible to join the crew in Auckland or at any of the ports on its trip. Count on NZ\$250 per day.

RED TAPE

Even on your own yacht, you're not completely free to do as you please (you are if you stick to the high seas, but if you want to take advantage of a country's facilities, you have to obey its laws). You must enter a country at an official 'port of entry' (usually the capital). If this means sailing past a dozen beautiful outlying islands on the way to an appointment with an official in a dull capital city, bad luck. Ports of entry are listed in the Transport section of the country chapters.

When you arrive, hoist your yellow quarantine flag (Q flag) and wait for the appropriate local official to contact you. Often, you are expected to alert them by VHF radio (usually on channel 16). Some countries, like the Marshall Islands for example, charge visiting yachties a hefty entrance fee (see Sea p286). Ask customs officials at the port of entry about requirements for visiting other islands in the country. Bear in mind that you are legally responsible for your crew's actions as well as your own.

LOCAL TRANSPORT Bicycle

On flat South Pacific islands, riding a bicycle can be an excellent way to get around. See Getting Around in the Transport section of the individual country chapters for more specific information, such as details about renting a bike. Most bikes will not come with a safety helmet or a bike lock unless you ask for them.

Watch for poor road surfaces, and check your travel insurance for disclaimers about hazardous activities. If you're bringing your own bike into the country, ask the airline about costs and rules regarding dismantling and packing the bike.

Boat

Within a country, ferries and/or cargo boats are often the only way to get to some of the outer islands. See Getting Around in the Transport section of individual country chapters for details about inter-island travel within a country.

Bus

Large and populous islands will usually have some kind of bus service. However, Pacific island public transport is rarely described as ruthlessly efficient. Buses

are often privately (or sometimes family) owned. It is not unusual for owner-drivers to set their own schedules, and if there aren't many people travelling on a particular day, the buses may just stop altogether. Build flexibility into your plans.

Car & Motorcycle

Larger islands and tourist destinations will usually have some car- or motorcycle-hire companies. Fares and rules vary enormously; see Transport in the individual country chapters for more details.

Most Pacific countries drive on the right-hand side of the road. The exceptions are the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru. Take extra care when you're driving on the 'wrong' side of the road – or when crossing the road on foot.

In rural areas, roads may be no more than dirt tracks used mostly for foot traffic. Be wary of people or animals on the road; drive especially carefully near villages. Road conditions can be atrocious if there has been cyclone or flood damage recently (or even if there hasn't!).

When you rent a car, ask about petrol availability if you're heading off the main routes, and make sure you get the insurance rules and conditions explained. Check your own travel insurance policy too; some do not cover unsealed roads or riding a motorcycle.

Prior to travelling, check whether you need an International Driving Permit to drive in the countries you are visiting.

Hitching

In some Pacific countries hitching is an accepted way of getting where you're going, and is practised by locals and tourists alike. In others it's not the local custom and only tourists are seen trying it. It is possible anywhere, however, and can be quite fast.

The main difficulty on a Pacific island is that rides won't be very long, perhaps only from one village to the next, and it could take you a while to go a longer distance. Still, given the sorry state of the bus service in some regions, hitching is a way to see the area without renting a car. It's also a great way to meet the locals and is an option for getting home after the buses have stopped, which can happen at almost any time in

some areas. You might be expected to pay a small fee for a ride, so offer what you think the ride is worth – although offers of payment will often be refused.

Keep in mind that hitching is never entirely safe; if you do choose to hitch, it is safer to travel in pairs.

TOURS

Many travellers now seek activity-based holidays, and several of these types of trips are packaged into organised tours. Local companies often specialise in activity-based tours – see the Tours sections in the individual country chapters.

Health

Dr Michael Sorokin

CONTENTS

Before You Go	845
Insurance	845
Recommended Vaccinations	845
Medical Checklist	846
Internet Resources	846
Further Reading	847
In Transit	847
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	847
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	847
In the South Pacific	847
Availability & Cost of Health Care	847
Infectious Diseases	849
Traveller's Diarrhoea	850
Environmental hazards	851
Traditional Medicine	853

With sensible precautions and behaviour, the health risk to travellers to the Pacific region is low. Mosquito-transmitted disease is the main problem. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu share the one serious hazard: malaria (the Solomons also has saltwater crocodiles). Elsewhere the main danger is from mosquito-borne dengue fever. The region is rabies-free.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is key to staying healthy while abroad. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity or obtain a prepared pack from a travel health clinic.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance does not cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. Check the Travel Links section of the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_links for more information. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. In many countries doctors expect payment in cash.

For Americans, check whether your health plan covers expenses in countries associated with the USA – American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana Islands and Palau. If you are a EU citizen you have the same rights in French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna as you do in France, but remember to obtain the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before leaving home. It is still best to have private health insurance cover. New Zealanders may have free access to public but not private facilities in the Cook Islands. Serious illness or injury may require evacuation, for example from Saipan to Guam or from Tuvalu to Fiji, or even from those countries with 'good' health facilities to a major regional centre, for example from Suva to Auckland. Make sure that your health insurance has provision for evacuation. Under these circumstances hospitals will accept direct payment from major international insurers, but for all other health-related costs cash up front is the usual requirement.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. A recent influenza vaccination is always a good idea when travelling. If you have not had chicken pox (varicella), consider being vaccinated.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It is a very good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you in case of minor illness or injury. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- Antibiotics (prescription only), eg ciprofloxacin (Ciproxin) or norfloxacin (Utinor, Noroxin)
- Antibiotic plus steroid eardrops (prescription only), eg Sofradex, Kenacort otic
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin*
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial ointment (prescription only; eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Antimalarial pills
- Antigiardia tablets (prescription only; eg tinidazole)
- Steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls, waterproof dressings
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers#
- Thermometer
- Pocket knife#
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- Sun block
- Oral rehydration salts (eg Gastrolyte, Diarolyte, Replete)
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Syringes and sterile needles, and intravenous fluids if travelling in very remote areas

*Aspirin should not be used for fever; it can cause bleeding in cases of dengue fever
#Not in carry-on luggage

If you are travelling more than 24 hours away from a town area, consider taking a self-diagnostic kit that can identify, from a finger prick, malaria in the blood (applies only to Solomons and Vanuatu).

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the Internet. For further information, the Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The WHO

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

If you have been in a designated yellow fever country within the previous six days, you need an International Certificate of Vaccination against yellow fever for entry into American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Pitcairn, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Marshall Islands and Palau may require evidence of vaccination against cholera if you have arrived from a currently infected country.

For all countries in the region, vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever.

For Guam and Northern Mariana Islands, it is recommended that some visitors are vaccinated against Japanese B encephalitis (see p849).

Side Effects of Vaccinations

All vaccinations can produce slight soreness and redness at the inoculation site, and a mild fever with muscle aches over the first 24 hours. These side effects are less likely with hepatitis A inoculations and a little more common with hepatitis B and typhoid inoculations. Japanese B encephalitis vaccine has been associated with allergic reactions that require an antihistamine. Yellow-fever vaccine is dangerous for anyone with an egg allergy, and in about 5% of cases causes a flu-like illness any time within a week of vaccination.

publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, revised annually and available online at www.who.int/ith at no cost. Other websites of general interest are **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country and is updated daily, also available at no cost; the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (www.cdc.gov); **Fit for Travel** (www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk), which has up-to-date information about outbreaks and is very user-friendly; and www.traveldoctor.com.au, a similar Australian site.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

FURTHER READING

Good options for further reading include *Travel with Children*, by Cathy Lanigan, and *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, by Dr Isabelle Young.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights, you should walk about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco. There is no good evidence that aspirin prevents DVT.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones), try drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep and so on) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) or promethazine (Avomine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness, but they are more effective in prevention than in treatment. A herbal alternative is ginger.

IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

The quality of health care varies over the region and within each country. Health facilities range from 'very good' in Guam; 'good' in Fiji, French Polynesia, Palau and

American Samoa; 'reasonable' in the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu; and 'basic' in the other countries. These are all small countries with limited budgets, so even 'good' does not necessarily equate to the facilities you could expect in a well-developed country.

Having 'good' health services means that the country has readily available doctors in private practice and standard hospital and laboratory facilities with consultants in the major specialties – internal medicine, obstetrics/gynaecology, orthopaedics, ophthalmology, paediatrics, pathology, psychiatry and general surgery. Private dentists, opticians and pharmacies are also available. Guam and, to a lesser extent French Polynesia, have very good military medical facilities, but the private sector is so well developed that civilians will not normally have access to these.

In countries where facilities are 'reasonable', specialised services may be limited or available periodically, but private general practitioners, dentists and pharmacies are present.

'Basic' services refers to the presence of nurses, midwives and a few doctors, limited government dental services, unreliable pharmaceutical supplies and hospitals far removed from Western standards.

Even in the countries with more developed facilities, the further you get from main cities the more basic the services. In secondary centres and outer islands, the quality of service is generally lower – not necessarily because of staffing but because of lower-quality diagnostic and treatment facilities. Small hospitals, health centres and clinics are situated conveniently throughout the region, but staffing and facilities will vary. Intergovernmental or church-mission aid and doctors may well be present in some of these facilities.

Private consultation and private hospital fees are approximately equivalent to Australian costs, varying from more expensive in Guam (where pharmaceuticals can be at least as costly as in the USA) to much less expensive in Tonga. Government-provided service fees vary from modest to negligible, but waiting times can be very long. Direct payment is required everywhere except where a specific arrangement is made, eg in

the case of evacuation or where a prolonged hospital stay is necessary; your insurer will need to be contacted by you. Although most of the larger hospitals are coming into line in accepting credit cards, there will be difficulty with the more remote small hospitals. Also, most private practitioners are reluctant to acceptable this form of payment, except for the larger private doctor groups in Guam, American Samoa, Fiji and Tahiti. Even these still prefer cash, and not all credit cards are accepted – check with the relevant company beforehand. If a credit card is not accepted you should be able to arrange cash on credit through the local banking system, but in more remote areas, such as Tokelau and Futuna, you won't find a bank. Keeping a few hundred dollars in travellers cheques is a wise move.

Most commonly used medications are available in countries with good or reasonable health care. Where only basic care is available, even aspirin and antiseptics may be hard to come by. Private pharmacies are not allowed by law to dispense listed drugs without prescription from a locally registered practitioner, but many will do so for travellers if shown the container. While the container should preferably specify the generic name of the drug, this has become much less of a problem with the use of Internet search engines.

Commonly used drugs, including oral contraceptives and antibiotics, can be found in the main centres, where there are private pharmacies, but don't expect large supplies. Oral contraceptives are obtainable without prescription in Fiji, as is the 'morning after' pill. Asthma inhalers and the majority of anti-inflammatories are over-the-counter preparations in Guam, the Samoas, Fiji and Tahiti. Even in the 'good' countries it's best to have a sufficient supply of a regularly taken drug, as particular brands may not be available and quantities can be limited. This applies particularly to psychotropic drugs, such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, anti-epileptics and mood elevators.

Insulin is available even in the smaller centres, but you cannot guarantee getting a particular brand, combination or preferred administration method. If you have been prescribed the very latest oral antidiabetic or antihypertensive make sure you have enough for the duration of your travel.

Except in the remote poorly staffed clinics, the standard of medical and dental care is generally quite good even if facilities are not sophisticated. The overall risk of illness for a normally healthy person is low; the most common problems are diarrhoeal upsets, viral sore throats, and ear and skin infections, all of which can mostly be treated with self-medication. For serious symptoms, such as sustained fever or chest or abdominal pains, it is best to go to the nearest clinic or private practitioner in the first instance.

Tampons and pads are readily available in main centres but do not rely on getting them if you travel to one of the outer islands. Dengue fever, especially in the first three months of pregnancy, poses a hazard because of fever, but otherwise there is no reason why a normal pregnancy should prevent travel to the region (except perhaps to the Solomon Islands and parts of Vanuatu, because of malaria; see p850). However, on general principles immunisation in the first three months of pregnancy is not recommended, and Japanese B encephalitis or yellow fever vaccines should not be given.

AVOIDING MOSQUITO BITES

Travellers are well advised to prevent mosquito bites at all times to avoid potentially serious diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever, and for their own comfort. The best advice:

- Wear light-coloured clothing
- Wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts
- Use mosquito repellents containing the compound DEET on exposed areas (prolonged overuse of DEET may be harmful, especially to children, but its use is considered preferable to being bitten by disease-transmitting mosquitoes)
- Avoid perfumes or aftershaves
- Use a mosquito net impregnated with mosquito repellent (permethrin) – it may be worth taking your own net
- Impregnate clothes with permethrin to effectively deter mosquitoes and other insects.

For young children, it is again dengue fever that could be a problem. The disease tends to come in epidemics mainly in the hotter, wetter months, so it should be possible to plan holidays accordingly. In tropical climates dehydration develops very quickly when a fever and/or diarrhoea and vomiting occur.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dengue Fever

Risk All countries, especially in the hotter, wetter months. Dengue fever is spread through the bite of the mosquito. It causes a feverish illness with headache and severe muscle pains similar to those experienced with a bad, prolonged attack of influenza. There might also be a fine rash. Mosquito bites should be avoided whenever possible – be obsessive about the use of insect repellents (see the boxed text, opposite). Self-treatment includes paracetamol, fluids and rest. Danger signs are prolonged vomiting, blood in the vomit and/or a blotchy dark red rash.

Eosinophilic Meningitis

Risk Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Tonga

A strange illness manifested by scattered abnormal skin sensations, fever and sometimes by the meningitis symptoms (headache, vomiting, confusion, stiffness of the neck and spine), which give it its name. Eosinophilic meningitis is caused by a microscopic parasite – the rat lungworm – that contaminates raw food. There is no proven specific treatment, but symptoms may require hospitalisation. For prevention, pay strict attention to advice on food and drink.

Hepatitis A

Risk All countries

Hepatitis A is a viral disease causing liver inflammation. Fever, debility and jaundice (yellow colouration of the skin and eyes, together with dark urine) occur and recovery is slow. Most people recover completely over time, but the virus can be dangerous to people with other forms of liver disease, the elderly and sometimes to pregnant women towards the end of pregnancy. It is spread by contaminated food or water. Self-treatment consists of rest, a low-fat diet and avoidance of alcohol. The vaccine is close to 100% protective.

Hepatitis B

Risk All countries

Like hepatitis A, hepatitis B is a viral disease causing liver inflammation, but the problem is more serious and the virus frequently goes on to cause chronic liver disease and even cancer. It is spread, like HIV, by mixing bodily fluids as in sexual intercourse, by contaminated needles and by accidental blood contamination. Treatment is complex and specialised, but vaccination is highly effective.

Hepatitis C

Risk Incidence is uncertain within the region but must be assumed to be present

Hepatitis C is a viral disease similar to hepatitis B. It causes liver inflammation that can go on to become chronic liver disease or result in a symptomless carrier state. The virus is spread almost entirely by blood contamination from shared needles or contaminated needles used for tattooing or body piercing. Treatment is complex and specialised. There is no vaccine available.

HIV/AIDS

Risk All countries

The incidence of HIV infection is on the rise in the whole Pacific region. Government reports usually underestimate the size of the problem, so when international conference discussions say that the incidence is reaching epidemic proportions you can take it that the danger posed by unprotected sex is huge; condoms are essential. If you require an injection for anything, check that a new needle is being used or have your own supply.

Japanese B Encephalitis

Reported outbreaks Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Nauru (the potential exists for other countries in the region)

Japanese B encephalitis is a serious viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes. Early symptoms are flu-like and this is usually as far as the infection goes, but sometimes the illness proceeds to cause brain fever (encephalitis), which has a high death rate. There is no specific treatment. Effective vaccination is available – it involves three inoculations over a month and is expensive. Allergic and sensitivity reactions to the vaccine, though rare, can occur. Vaccination

is usually recommended for anyone staying more than a few weeks and/or going to work in villages.

Leptospirosis

Risk American Samoa, Guam, Fiji, French Polynesia, Palau, possibly elsewhere

Also known as Weil's disease, leptospirosis produces fever, headache, jaundice and, later, kidney failure. It is caused by a spirochaete organism found in water contaminated by rat urine. The organism penetrates skin, so swimming in flooded areas is a risk practice. If diagnosed early, the disease is cured with penicillin.

Malaria

Risk Solomon Islands (except the outlying atolls and Honiara), Vanuatu (except Port Vila and Futuna, Tongoa, Aneityum and Mystery Islands)

Malaria is a parasite infection transmitted by infected anopheles mosquitoes. While these mosquitoes are regarded as night feeders, they can emerge when light intensity is low (eg in overcast conditions under the jungle canopy or the interior of dark huts). In the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, both malignant (*falciparum*) and less threatening but relapsing forms are present. Since no vaccine is available, travellers must rely on mosquito-bite prevention (including topical insect repellents, knockdown insecticides and, where necessary, bed nets impregnated with permethrin – see the boxed text, p848) and taking antimalarial drugs before, during and after risk exposure. No antimalarial is 100% effective.

Malaria causes a variety of symptoms but the essence of the disease is fever. In a malarial zone it is best to assume that fever is due to malaria unless blood tests rule it out. This applies to up to a few months after leaving the area as well. Malaria is curable if diagnosed early.

Tuberculosis

Risk Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, Northern Mariana Islands, Tuvalu

The scourge of the 19th century, tuberculosis has not been eliminated in the region and there is something of a resurgence where HIV/AIDS is prevalent. It is spread by droplet infection from an infected person and is a risk for household contacts or healthcare workers but not for transient

travellers. Vaccination with the related BCG organism has been abandoned by US authorities, and other countries recommend it only for special cases. The best protection against tuberculosis is a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Typhoid Fever

Risk Sporadic in all countries

Typhoid fever is a bacterial infection acquired from contaminated food and/or water. The germ can be transmitted by food handlers and flies, and can be present in inadequately cooked shellfish. It causes fever, debility and late-onset diarrhoea. Untreated it can produce delirium and is occasionally fatal, but the infection is curable with antibiotics. Vaccination is moderately effective, but care with eating and drinking is equally important.

Yaws

Risk Solomon Islands

Yaws is a bacterial infection that causes multiple skin ulcers. It was thought to have been eliminated, but there has been a recent resurgence. Infection is conveyed by direct contact. Treatment with penicillin produces a dramatic cure.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Diarrhoea (ie frequent, loose bowel movements) is caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites present in contaminated food or water. In temperate climates the cause is usually viral, but in the tropics bacteria or parasites are more usual. If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte, Gastrolyte, Replite). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should take an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain, seek medical attention.

Giardiasis

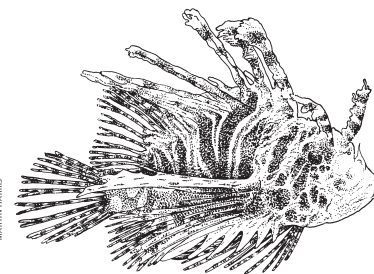
A parasite present in contaminated water, giardia causes bloating and a foul-smelling and persistent although not 'explosive' diarrhoea. A single dose (four tablets) of tinidazole usually cures the infection.

VENOMOUS MARINE LIFE

Probably the most dangerous thing you'll have to worry about when snorkelling over a reef is sunburn. However, there are several venomous critters worth mentioning in case of a chance encounter.

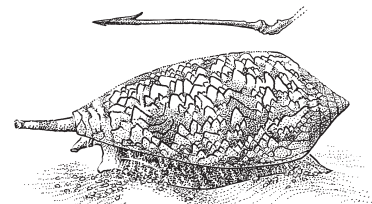
The well-camouflaged stonefish spends much of its time on the sea floor pretending to be a weed-covered rock. If you tread on a stonefish's sharp, extremely venomous dorsal spines, you'll find that the pain is immediate and incapacitating. Bathing the wound in hot water reduces the pain and the effects of the venom, but medical attention should be sought urgently.

The lionfish, a relative of the stonefish, is a strikingly banded brown and white fish with large, graceful dorsal fins containing venomous spines. Lionfish are obvious when they're swimming around, but they can also hide under ledges.



Cone Shell

Then there's the cone shell, several species of which have highly toxic venom. The bad ones have a venomous proboscis – a rapidly extendible, dartlike stinging device that can reach any part of the shell's outer surface. Cone shell venom can be fatal. Stings should be immobilised with a tight pressure bandage (not a tourniquet) and splint. Get medical attention immediately.



Lionfish

Avoid contact with jellyfish, which have stinging tentacles; seek local advice. Dousing in vinegar will deactivate any stingers that have not 'fired'. Calamine lotion, antihistamines and analgesics may reduce the reaction and relieve the pain. Other stinging sea creatures include flame or stinging coral and sea urchins.

Generally speaking, the best way to avoid contact with any of the above while you're in the water is to look but don't touch. Shoes with strong soles will provide protection from stonefish, but reef walking damages the reef, so you shouldn't be doing it anyway – regard the stonefish as an environmental protection officer.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Threats to health from animals and insects are rare indeed, but travellers need to be aware of them.

Bites & Stings

Saltwater crocodile attacks, though rare, are well recorded in the Solomon Islands. Crocodiles can swim into tidal rivers; heed local warnings.

JELLYFISH

Watch out for the whip-like stings of the blue-coloured Indo-Pacific man-of-war. If you see these floating in the water or stranded on the beach, it is wise not to go in the water. The

sting is very painful and is best treated with vinegar or ice packs. Do not use alcohol.

POISONOUS CONE SHELLS

Poisonous cone shells abound along shallow coral reefs. Avoid handling them (for an illustration, see above). Stings mainly cause local reactions, but nausea, faintness, palpitations or difficulty in breathing are signs that flag the need for medical attention.

SEA SNAKES

As in all tropical waters sea snakes may be seen around coral reefs. Unprovoked, sea snakes are extremely unlikely to attack and their fangs will not penetrate a wet suit.

Coral Ear

Coral ear is a common name for inflammation of the ear canal. It has nothing to do with coral, and is caused by water entering the canal activating any fungal spores that may be lying around and predisposing the area to bacterial infection and inflammation. Inflammation usually starts after swimming but can be reactivated by water dripping into the ear canal after a shower, especially if long, wet hair lies over the ear opening.

Apparently trivial, it can be very, very painful and can spoil a holiday. Apart from diarrhoea, it is the most common reason for travellers to consult a doctor. Self-treatment with an antibiotic plus steroid eardrop preparation is very effective. Stay out of the water until pain and itching have gone.

Coral Cuts

Cuts and abrasions from dead coral cause no more trouble than similar injuries from any other sort of rock, but live coral can cause prolonged infection. Never touch coral. If you do happen to cut yourself on live coral, treat the wound immediately. Get out of the water as soon as possible, clean the wound thoroughly, getting out all the little bits of coral, apply an antiseptic and cover with a waterproof dressing. You can then get back in the water if you want to.

Diving Hazards

Because the region has wonderful opportunities for scuba diving, it is easy to get over-excited and neglect strict depth and time precautions. Few dives are very deep, but the temptation to spend longer than safe amounts of time at relatively shallow depths is great and is probably the main cause of decompression illness (the 'bends') in the region. Early pains may not be severe and may be attributed to other causes, but any muscle or joint pain after scuba diving must be suspect.

At the time of writing, privately run compression chambers can be found in Guam, Fiji, Nauru, Palau (this one is state-of-the-art), Tahiti, Vanuatu and Yap (Federated States of Micronesia), but transport to a chamber can be difficult. Supply of oxygen to the chambers is sometimes a problem. Novice divers must be especially careful. Even experienced divers should check with organisations like Divers' Alert Network

(DAN; <http://www.diversalertnetwork.org>) about the current site and status of compression chambers, and insurance to cover costs.

Food & Water

The municipal water supply in capital cities and other large towns in the region can be trusted, but elsewhere avoid untreated tap water. In some areas the only fresh water available may be rainwater collected in tanks and this should be boiled. Steer clear of ice. Only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Eat food that is heated right through and avoid buffet-style meals. Food in restaurants frequented by locals is not necessarily safe, but most resort hotels have good standards of hygiene, although individual food-handlers can carry infection. Food that comes to you piping hot is likely to be safe. Be wary of salads. If you are preparing your own salads from market produce, make sure that each piece and leaf is thoroughly washed with water that is safe. Be adventurous by all means, but expect to suffer the consequences if you succumb to temptation and try raw fish or crustaceans as eaten by some locals.

FISH POISONING

Ciguatera is a form of poisoning that affects otherwise safe and edible fish unpredictably. Poisoning is characterised by stomach upsets, itching, faintness, slow pulse and bizarre inverted sensations – cold feeling hot and vice versa. Ciguatera has been reported in many carnivorous reef fish, including red snapper, barracuda and even Spanish mackerel; in French Polynesia it is quite frequent in the smaller reef fish. There is no safe test to determine whether a fish is poisonous or not and although local knowledge is not entirely reliable it is reasonable to eat what the locals are eating. Fish caught

after times of reef destruction, such as after a major hurricane, are more likely to be poisonous. Deep-sea tuna is perfectly safe.

Treatment consists of rehydration, and if the pulse is very slow medication may be needed. Healthy adults will make a complete recovery although disturbed sensation may persist for some weeks – sometimes much longer.

Heat

The region lies within the tropics so it is hot and for the most part humid.

Heat exhaustion is actually a state of dehydration associated, to a greater or lesser extent, with salt loss. Natural heat loss is through sweating and so it is easy to become dehydrated without realising it. Thirst is a late sign. Heat exhaustion is prevented by drinking at least 2L to 3L of water per day – more if actively exercising. Salt-replacement solutions are useful, as muscle weakness and cramps are due to salt as well as water loss and can be made worse by drinking water alone. The powders used for treating dehydration due to diarrhoea are just as effective when dehydration is due to heat exhaustion. Apart from commercial solutions, a reasonable drink consists of a good pinch of salt to a pint (half-litre) of water. Salt tablets can result in too much salt being taken, and can cause headaches and confusion.

HEAT STROKE

When sweating's cooling effect fails, heat stroke ensues. This is an emergency condition characterised not only by muscle weakness and exhaustion but also by mental confusion. Skin will be hot and dry. If this occurs, 'put the fire out' by cooling the body with water on the outside and if possible with cold drinks for the inside. Seek medical help for follow up.

Sunburn

Exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun causes burning of the skin with accompanying pain and misery and the long-

term danger of skin cancer. The time of highest risk is between 11am and 3pm; remember that cloud cover does not block out UV rays. Sunburn is likely to be a particular problem for those taking doxycycline as an antimalarial. The Australian 'slip, slop, slap' slogan is a useful mantra: slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen and slap on a hat. Treat sunburn as you would any other burn – cool, wet dressings are best. Severe swelling may respond to a cortisone cream.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The Pacific region has been settled for thousands of years and systems of treatment involving local herbs, roots and leaves have evolved over the centuries, with each region or village having its own traditional healers. Some of these folk remedies undoubtedly have effective ingredients, and governments and research institutions are currently actively investigating many of them. Extravagant claims (eg AIDS cures, aphrodisiacs) can be ignored, and it is best to avoid the more exotic compounds made with animal ingredients. Tree-bark concoctions for fever are similar to aspirin in their effects. Chinese herbs are available in all of the main towns.

Kava (see p82) is a concoction made from the root of *Piper methysticum* and has sedative and muscle relaxant properties. When taken in concentrated form (eg tablets) or when mixed with alcohol it has been linked with liver damage, but mild 'tourist' social drinking will cause little harm other than indigestion. Kava is drunk throughout the region, most commonly in Fiji, New Caledonia, the Samoan islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Betel-nut chewing (see p132) is common in the Solomon Islands, Palau and Yap (Federated States of Micronesia). It has an astringent effect in the mouth, but claims about other healing properties remain unproven. Prolonged users are predisposed to mouth cancers.

DRINKING WATER

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets), and steer clear of ice. This is a sensible overall precaution, but the municipal water supply in capital cities in the region can be trusted.

Glossary

'aiga – see *kainga* (Samoa)
'ainga – see *kainga*
'ava – see *kava* (Samoa)
ahima'a – earth/stone oven
ahu – raised altar or chiefly backrest found on ancient *marae* (Polynesia)
aitu – spirit, ghost (Polynesia)
aliki – see *ariki*
ali'i – see *ariki*
ari'i – see *ariki*
ariki – paramount chief; members of a noble family
atoll – low-lying island built up by coral deposits
atua – god or gods (Polynesia)
auaaluma – society of unmarried women (western Polynesia)
aumaga – see *aumanga* (Samoa and Tokelau)
aumanga – society of untitled men who do most of the fishing and farming (Polynesia)
Austronesians – people or languages from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Pacific islands

babai – large plant resembling taro, commonly eaten in Kiribati
bai – traditional men's meeting house (Palau)
barrier reef – a long, narrow coral reef lying offshore and separated from the land by a lagoon of deep water that shelters the land from the sea; see also *fringing reef*
bêche-de-mer – lethargic bottom-dwelling sea creature
beka – see *peka* (Fiji)
bigman – chief (Solomons, Vanuatu)
bilibili – bamboo raft (Fiji)
bito – vessel made from half a coconut shell and used for drinking *kava* (Fiji)
biu – treehouse for initiated boys (Solomon Islands)
blackbirding – a 19th-century recruitment scheme little removed from outright slavery
bonito – blue-fin tuna
borrow pits – pits dug out to provide landfill (Tuvalu)
bougna – traditional *Kanak* meal of yam, *taro* and sweet potatoes with chicken, fish or crustaceans, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in coconut milk in an earth oven (New Caledonia)
bringue – family event with friends (French Polynesia)
bula – Fijian greeting
burao – wild hibiscus tree
bure – thatched dwelling (Fiji)

cagou – flightless bird with a call like a dog's bark; unofficial symbol of New Caledonia

Caldоче – white people born in New Caledonia whose ancestral ties go back to the convicts or the early French settlers
cargo cults – religious movements whose followers hope for the imminent delivery of vast quantities of modern wealth (cargo), from either supernatural forces or the inhabitants of faraway countries
case – traditional *Kanak* house (New Caledonia); see also *grande case*
CFP – Cour de franc Pacifique (also called the Pacific franc); the local currency in all three of France's Pacific territories
Chamorro – the indigenous people of the Mariana Islands including Guam
chef – customary leader of a clan (New Caledonia)
CNMI – Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
dalo – see *taro* (Fiji)
dapal – a women's meeting house in Yap
drua – double-hulled canoe (Fiji)

'ei – necklace (Cook Islands)

fa'a – see *faka*
fa'afafine – see *fakaleiti* (Samoa)
fafine – see *vahine*
faka – according to (a culture's) customs and tradition, eg *fa'a Samoa* or *faka Pasifika*
fakaleiti – man who dresses and lives as a woman (Tonga)
fale – house with thatched roof and open sides, but often used to mean any building
fale fonu – meeting house, village hall or parliament building
fale umu – kitchen huts
faluw – a Yapese meeting house for men
fanua – see *fenua* (Samoa)
fare – see *fale*
fatele – traditional music and dance performance (Tuvalu)
fenua – land
fiafia – dance performance (Samoa)
fono – governing council (Polynesian)
FSM – Federated States of Micronesia
fusi – cooperative stores (Tuvalu)

gite – group of bungalows used for tourist accommodation (French territories)
grade-taking – process by which Melanesian men progress through a series of castes, proving their worth through feasts and gifts; see *nimangki*

grande case – big house where tribal chiefs meet; see also *case*

heilala – Tonga's national flower
honu – turtle (French Polynesia)
horue – surfing (French Polynesia)
hôtel de ville – see *mairie*

i'a – see *ika*
ika – fish
I-Kiribati – a native of Kiribati
I-Matang – foreigner (Kiribati)
inati – sharing (Tokelau)
iroij – chief (Marshall Islands)

jambos – picnics or trips (Marshall Islands)

kahlek – night fishing using burning torches to attract flying fish into hand-held nets (FSM)
kai – food
kaiga – see *kainga*
kainga – extended family (Polynesia)
kaleve – see *kaokioki* (Tokelau)
kaloama – juvenile goatfish (Niue)
Kanak – indigenous New Caledonians
kanaka – people (Polynesia)
kaokioki – beer-like fermented coconut drink (Solomons, Vanuatu)
kastom – custom; rules relating to traditional beliefs (Solomons, Vanuatu)
kastom ownership – traditional ownership of land, objects or reef
katuali – black-and-grey-striped sea kraits (Niue)
kava – mud-coloured, mildly intoxicating drink made from the roots of the *Piper methysticum* plant
kikau – thatch-roofed
kilikiti – see *kirikiti*
kirikiti – cricket with many players on each side (French Polynesia, Samoa, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna)
korkor – a Marshallese dugout fishing canoe made from a breadfruit log
koutu – ancient open-air royal courtyard (Cook Islands)
kuli – see *kuri*
kumala – see *kumara*
kumara – sweet potato
kuri – dogs

la coutume – custom (New Caledonia); see *kastom*
lanai – a Hawaiian word commonly used in Micronesia to refer to a veranda
Lapita – ancestors of the Polynesians
laplap – Vanuatu national dish
latte stones – the stone foundation pillars used to support ancient Chamorro buildings in the Marianas; the shafts and capstones were carved from limestone quarries

lava-lava – sarong-type garment; wide piece of cloth worn as a skirt by women and men
lei – see *'ei*
LMS – London Missionary Society
lovo – traditional feast (Fiji)

mahimahi – dolphin fish
mahu – see *fakaleiti* (French Polynesia)
maire – aromatic leaf (Cook Islands)
mairie – town hall (French Polynesia, New Caledonia)
makatea – geological term for a raised coral island; coral coastal plain around an island
mal mal – *T-piece* of cotton on *tapa* cloth worn by male dancers (Vanuatu)
malae – see *marae*
malo – Polynesian greeting
man blong majik/posen – sorcerers
mana – personal spiritual power
maneaba – community meeting house (Kiribati)
maneapa – community meeting house (Tuvalu)
manu – birds
Maohi – see *Maori*
Maori – indigenous people (Cook Islands, Society Islands)
marae – community village green (western Polynesia); pre-Christian sacred site (eastern Polynesia); ceremonial meeting ground (Cook Islands)
masi – bark cloth with designs printed in black and rust (Fiji)
matai – senior male, political representative of a family (Samoa, Tokelau and Tuvalu)
mataiapo – see *matai* (Cook Islands)
me'ae – see *marae*
meke – dance performance that enacts stories and legends (Fiji)
Melanesia – islands of the western Pacific comprising Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji; the name is Greek for 'black islands'
Métro – someone from France (New Caledonia)
Micronesia – islands of the northwestern Pacific, including Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, FSM, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Kiribati; the name is Greek for 'small islands'
mission dress – see *muu-muu*
moa – chicken
moai – large stone statues (Easter Island)
Mother Hubbard – see *muu-muu*
motu – island, islet
muu-muu – long, loose-fitting dress introduced to the Pacific by the missionaries
mwaramwars – head- wreaths of flowers and fragrant leaves (FSM)

naghol – land-diving ritual (Vanuatu)
nahnmwarki – district chief (Pohnpei)

nahs – traditional ceremonial house (Pohnpei)
nakamal – men's clubhouse (New Caledonia, Vanuatu)
namalao – fowl-like megapode
namba – traditional sheath (Vanuatu)
natsaro – traditional dancing ground (Vanuatu)
nguzunguzu – carved wooden canoe figurehead (Solomons)
nimangki – status and power earned by *grade-taking* (Vanuatu)
niu – coconut
ni-Vanuatu – people from Vanuatu
noni – age-defying juice (French Polynesia)
nono – small gnats, sandflies (French Polynesia)
nuku – village (Polynesian)
nu'u – see *nuku*

omung – a perfumed love potion (FSM)
ono – barracuda
ota – raw fish marinated in coconut milk and lime juice (Niue)

pa'anga – the currency of Tonga
PADI – Professional Association of Dive Instructors
pae pae – paved floor of a *marae*
pakalolo – marijuana (French Polynesia)
palagi – see *palangi*
palangi – white person, westerner (Polynesia)
Papuans – ancient people who are among the ancestors of modern Melanesians
pareo – see *pareu*
pareu – *lava-lava* (Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Vanuatu)
parpa – see *pareu*
pe'a – see *peka* (Samoa)
pebai – a Yapese community meeting house
peka – bat, small bird
pelagic – creatures living in the upper waters of the open ocean
pilou – *Kanak* dance, performed for important ceremonies or events
Polynesia – the huge triangle of ocean and islands bounded by Hawai'i, New Zealand and Easter Island; includes the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Pitcairn Island, Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna; the name is Greek for 'many islands'
Polynesian Outliers – the islands of eastern Melanesia and southern Micronesia that are populated by Polynesians
popaa – Westerner (French Polynesia)
pua'a – see *puaka*
puaka – pig (Polynesia)
pukao – topknot
pulenuku – head man, village mayor (Polynesia)
pulenu'u – see *pulenuku*

purse seine – large net generally used between two boats that is drawn around a school of fish, especially tuna; boats that use this method are called *purse seiners*

quonset hut – WWII military storage shed made from corrugated iron

ra'atira – see *rangatira* (Tahiti)
rae rae – see *fakaleiti* (French Polynesia)
ragatira – see *rangatira* (Samoa)
rai – Yapese stone money (FSM)
rangatira – chief, nobility (Polynesia)
ratu – chief (Fiji)
RFO – Radio France Outre-Mer
rori – see *bêche-de-mer* (French Polynesia)

sa – sacred, forbidden; holy day, holy time (Samoa and Tuvalu)
sakau – see *kava*
Saudeleur – tyrannical royal dynasty that ruled ancient Pohnpei (FSM)
scrab faol – see *skrab dak*
seka – narcotic ceremonial drink similar to *kava* (FSM)
sevusevu – presentation of a gift to a village chief and, by extension, to the ancestral gods and spirits (Fiji)
siapo – *tapa* (Samoa)
skrab dak – megapode bird (Solomon Islands)
snack – cheap café (French Territories)
SPF – South Pacific Forum
SPTO – South Pacific Tourism Organisation
sulu – see *lava-lava* (Fiji and Tuvalu)
swim-through – hole or tunnel large enough to swim through

tabu – see *tapu*
tagimoucia – national flower of Fiji
tahua – see *tufanga* (Tahiti)
tamaaraa – traditional-style feast
tamtam – slit-gong, slit-drum; made from carved logs with a hollowed-out section (Vanuatu)
tanata – people (Polynesia)
tangata – see *tanata*
tano'a – multi-legged wooden bowl used for mixing *kava* (Wallis and Futuna)
ta'ovala – distinctive woven pandanus mats worn around the waist in Tonga
tapa – see *masi*
tapu – sacred, prohibited
taro – plant with green heart-shaped leaves, cultivated for both its leaf and edible rootstock
tatau – tattoo
taulasea – traditional healer (Samoa)
taupo – ceremonial virgin (Samoa)
taupou – title bestowed by high-ranking chief upon a young woman of his family (Polynesia)

taupulega – village council of elders and *matai* (Tokelau)
thu – a loincloth worn by Yapese males and by outer island Chuukese
tifaifai – see *tivaevae* (French Polynesia)
tiki – carved human figure (Polynesia)
tivaevae – colourful intricately sewn appliqué works (Cook Islands)
tokosra – paramount chief (FSM)
to'ona'i – Sunday lunch (Samoa)
T-piece – small piece of cloth covering only the groin area (Solomons, Vanuatu)
tre pang – *bêche-de-mer*
tu' – see *tui* (Tonga)
tuba – see *kaokiaki* (Yap, FSM)
tufanga – priest, expert (Polynesia)
tufuga – see *tufanga* (Samoa)
tui – paramount king (central Pacific)
tumunu – hollowed-out coconut-tree stump used to brew bush-beer; also bush-beer drinking sessions

'umala – see *kumara*
uga – coconut crab
ulihega – bait fish (Niue)
umete – wooden dishes (French Polynesia)
umu – earth oven
umukai – feast of foods cooked in an *umu*
unimane – respected old men or village elders (Kiribati)
USP – University of the South Pacific

va'a – see *vaka*
vahine – woman (Polynesia)
vaka – canoe
vale – see *fale* (Fiji)
vanua – see *fenua* (Melanesia)

wantok – one talk; the western Melanesian concept that all those who speak your language are allies (Solomon Islands)

yaqona – see *kava* (Fiji)

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Index

ABBREVIATIONS

AS – American Samoa
CI – Cook Islands
EI – Easter Island
Fi – Fiji
FP – French Polynesia
FSM – Federated States of Micronesia
Gu – Guam
Ki – Kiribati
MI – Marshall Islands
Na – Nauru
NC – New Caledonia
Ni – Niue
NMI – Northern Mariana Islands
Pa – Palau
PI – Pitcairn Island
Sa – Samoa
SI – Solomon Islands
Tk – Tokelau
To – Tonga
Tu – Tuvalu
UST – US Territories
Va – Vanuatu
WF – Wallis & Futuna

SYMBOLS

180-degree meridian (Fi) 202

A

A Nei Tabera Ni Kai 246
Aakapa (FP) 653
A'ama (SI) 572
Abaiang Atoll (Ki) 255-6, **256**
Abermama (Ki) 256-7
absailing 347
accommodation, *see also individual countries*
activities 824-6, *see also individual activity entries*
Agaña Bay (Gu) 231, **304**

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages

Ahe (FP) 650
AIDS 37, 849
air travel 835-6, 841
air passes 837-8
tickets 836-8
to/from the South Pacific 835-40
within the South Pacific 840-1
Airai State (Pa) 408
Aitutaki (CI) 454-9, **455**
Aitutaki Lagoon (CI) 456
Alofaaga Blowholes (Sa) 508
Alofi (Ni) 360, **360**
Alofi Island (WF) 817-19, **818**
Amatuku islet (Tu) 743
Ambae (Va) 803
Ambrym (Va) 789-93, **790**
Amédée Islet (NC) 316
American Memorial Park (NMI) 375
American Samoa 519-41, **520**
accommodation 537
activities 530, 537-8,
see also individual activity entries
best eating 521
business hours 538
children, travel with 530-1, 538
culture 521
embassies & consulates 538
history 520-1
Internet access 538
Internet resources 538
itineraries 522
language 521
money 539
shopping 533-4
telephone services 539
time 539
tours 531
travel to/from 540
travel within 540-1
visas 539
Ana Ana Lookout (Ni) 362
Anaho (FP) 653
'Anahulu Cave (To) 703
Anapala Chasm (Ni) 361
Anatakitaki Cave (CI) 461, **10**
Anatoloa Cave (Ni) 361
Anelcauhai (Va) 784
Angaur (Pa) 413-14, **414**

animals 62-4, *see also individual animals*
Ant Atoll (FSM) 116
Apia (Sa) 488-9, **490-1**
walking tour 489, **492**
Apolima (Sa) 495
Apra Harbor (Gu) 228
aquarium (NC) 315
Arahoho Blowhole (FP) 596
Arai-Te-Tonga (CI) 443
Arakabesang Island (Pa) 401
archaeology 86, 709, 816
architecture 55
Arno Atoll (MI) 281
'Arorangi (CI) 441
artificial islands (SI) 569
arts 55-9
Arts Village (Fi) 164
Arutanga (CI) 456
Atafu Atoll (TK) 683-4, **683**
'Atata (To) 705
'Atiu (CI) 460-3, **461**
ATMs 830, *see also money in individual countries*
Atuona (FP) 659-60
Auki (SI) 570-1, **571**
Auki Island (SI) 570
Auluta Gorge (SI) 572
Aunu'u (AS) 528
Austral Islands (FP) 662-5, **663**
Australian People for Health, Education & Development Abroad (Apheda) 547
Australian Volunteers International 760, 771
Avaiki Cave (Ni) 360
Avarua (CI) 440-1, **442-3**
Avatele (Ni) 362
Avatoru (FP) 644
Avera (FP) 664

B
Babeldaob (Pa) 407-10, **407**
Bahá'í House of Worship (Sa) 492-3
bai (Pa) 397, 400, 408, 409, **9**
Baie de Jinek (NC) 337
Baie de Kanuméra (NC) 344
Baie de Kuto (NC) 344
Baie de Matavai (FP) 596
Baie de St Joseph (NC) 344

Baie d'Oro (NC) 345
Bairiki (Ki) **249**
Baker Island (UST) **752-3**
Baker, Shirley 709
Balabat Village (FSM) 129
Banaba (Ocean Island) (Ki) 257-8
Banzai Cliff (NMI) 378
bark cloth 144, **302**,
see also tapa
basketry 270
Battle of Peleliu 410
Battle of Savo 545
Battle of Tanapag 378
Bay of Islands (Fi) 209
Bay of Wrecks (Ki) 260
Beachcomber Island (Fi) 181
beaches
2-Dollar Beach (AS) 528
Aganoa Black Sand Beach (Sa) 495
Alega Beach (AS) 528
Anakena beach (EI) pic 7
'Ano Beach (To) 722
Anse Vata (NC) 315
Aro'a (CI) 442
'Atiu beaches (CI) 461-2
Baie des Citrons (NC) 315, **306**
Bloody Beach (Pa) 412
Boulders (Sa) 495
Champagne Beach (Va) 800, **620**
Chulu Beach (NMI) 386
Eme'io Beach (To) 721
Enemanot (MI) 275
Family Beach (Gu) 228
Fangutave Beach (To) 705
Forbidden Island (NMI) 379
Gun Beach (Gu) 225
Halafuoleva Beach (To) 704
Hinakauea Beach (To) 722
Hio Beach (Ni) 360
Honeymoon Beach 412
Ipan Beach Park (Gu) 231
Kammer Beach (NMI) 383-4
Keitahi Beach (To) 721
Keleti Beach (To) 704
Ladder Beach (NMI) 380
Lalomani (Sa) 493
Lano (Sa) 506
Laulau Beach (NMI) 379
Les Sables Roses (FP) 645
Lonnoc Beach (Va) 800
Luengoni beach 337, **6**
Makave (To) 721
Marine Beach (NMI) 386
Mataveva (Sa) 494
Ma'u'uke beaches (CI) 464

Micro Beach (NMI) 375
Namu'a (Sa) 493
Nu'u'ulua (Sa) 493
Nu'utele (Sa) 493
Obyan Beach (NMI) 380
Onebulu (SI) 571
Orange Beach (Pa) 412
Pau Pau Beach (NMI) 377
Plage de Poé (NC) 325
Profile Beach (NMI) 379
Return to Paradise Beach (Sa) 494
Saeraghi Beach (SI) 562
St Lawrence Beach (Va) 776
Salamumu Beach (Sa) 494
Saleapaga (Sa) 493
Sand Beach (FP) 645
Si'ufaga (Sa) 506
Tachogna Beach Park (NMI) 384
Taga Beach Park (NMI) 384
Taliha Beach (To) 722
Talofofo Bay Beach Park (Gu) 231
Teavaro Beach (FP) 607
Tikioki (CI) 442
Titikaveka (CI) 442
Vaiula Beach (Sa) 495
Wanyan Beach (FSM) 130
White Sands Beach (Va) 775
Wing Beach (NMI) 377-8
Bechiyal (FSM) 130
bêches-de-mer 45-6
Bellona (SI) 568-9
Beqa (Fi) 166
betel nut 132
Betio (Ki) **250**
Big Nambas people 785, 787
Bikini Atoll (MI) 281
bird cave (FSM) 107
Bird Island Lookout (NMI) 379
Bird Island Trail (NMI) 379
bird sanctuary (NMI) 389
bird-watching 202, 800
birds 293, 310, 436, 527, 549, 558,
562, 589, 725, 816, **754**
books 64
Bishop Douarre 331
Black Coral Island (FSM) 115
Black Island (Va) 789-93
Black Rock (CI) 441
blackbirding 46
Bligh, William 424-5, 757
Blue Lagoon (Fi) 189
boat making 270
boat travel
to/from the South Pacific 840
within the South Pacific 841-3, 843

boating, *see also yachting*
Guam 238
New Caledonia 348
Vanuatu 770
books 30, 57
birds 64
Bounty mutiny 425
fish 64
health 847
history 40, 46, 48
Kiribati 262
Marshall Islands 285
Nauru 294
Niue 365
Solomon Islands 573
Tonga 726-7
Tuvalu 747
Bora Bora (FP) 631-9, **632-3**
bougna 347
Bounty bible (NC) 324
Bounty bible 426, **8**
Bounty Island (Fi) 180-1
Bounty mutiny 422-3, 424-5, 582, 712
Bourail (NC) 325
breadfruit 79
Brel, Jacques 659
Brooding Hen (NC) 330
bus travel 843
bush beer 463
business hours 826, *see also individual countries*
Butaritari Atoll (Ki) 257
butterflies 549, 562

C
cagoo 310
Canala (NC) 325-6
cannibalism 176
canoeing 53, 108, 273, **305**
canoes 273, **305**
Canopy Walkway (Sa) 507
Cape Taputapu (AS) 530
Caqalai (Fi) 193
car travel 843
Carp Island (Pa) 405
Carteret, Philip 422, 544
carving 58-9, 761
Castaway Island (Fi) 182-3
cathedrals, *see churches & cathedrals*
caves 461, 462, 464, 466, 469
Central Province (SI) 557-8
Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat (NC) 330
Centre Culturel Yeiwene Yeiwene (NC) 334

Cetti Bay Vista Point (Gu) 229
 Chamolinian Cultural Village (NMI) 377
 Chamorro Bay (FSM) 128
 Chamorro food 235
 Chamorro people 369, 386, 389
 Charapoana (SI) 566
 children, travel with 826-7, *see also individual countries*
 food 82
 health 849
 Christian, Fletcher 43, 422-3
 Christianity 54
 Christmas Island (Australia) 261
 Christmas Island (Kiritimati) (Ki) 259-62, **260**
 churches & cathedrals
 Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church (CI) 441
 Basilica of St Anthony of Padua (To) 695
 Cathédrale St Joseph (NC) 314, **307**
 Centenary Chapel (To) 695
 Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes (NC) 336
 Church of St Joseph (WF) 816
 Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica (Gu) 224
 Église Ste Jeanne d'Arc (NC) 327
 Leava Church (WF) 817
 Mitiaro CICC (CI) 467
 Navoka Methodist Church (Fi) 191
 Our Lady of Good Hope Cathedral (WF) 815
 Pierre Chanel church (WF) 817
 Saint Dionicio Church (Gu) 229
 St Joseph's Church (Gu) 230
 St Mary's Cathedral (To) 695
 San Dimas Church (Gu) 229
 Tamarua CICC (CI) 468
 Chuuk (FSM) 119-26, **120**
 cinema 31, 55-6
 climate 28-9, 61, 827
 climate change 66-7
 Cobra Rock (Fi) 199
 coconuts 64, 80, **617**
 Cocos Island (Gu) 229-30
 Cocos Island Resort (Gu) 230
 Coeur de Voh (NC) 327
 coffee plantations (CI) 462
 Colonia (FSM) 128, **129**
 commercial fishing 65
 conflict 38, 139-40, 545, 550, 555, 574
 consulates 828-9, *see also individual countries*
 convict prison (NC) 344
 Cook Island (Ki) 260
 Cook Islands 431-76, **433**
 accommodation 471
 activities 444-5, 456, 471-2, *see also individual activity entries*
 best eating 435
 business hours 472
 children, travel with 445-6, 472
 culture 432-5
 embassies & consulates 472-3
 history 432, 436, 454, 460, 467
 holidays 473
 Internet access 473
 Internet resources 473
 itineraries 436
 language 435-6
 money 473-4
 postal services 474
 safety issues 472
 shopping 453-4, 459-60, 463, 469-70
 telephone services 474
 time 474
 tourist information 474-5
 tours 446-7, 457, 462, 465, 469, 476
 travel to/from 475-6
 travel within 476
 visas 475
 Cook Islands Cultural Village (CI) 441
 Cook, James 44, 86, 259, 297, 357, 432, 582, 689, 757
 Cook's Bay (FP) 606
 Copra Shed Marina (Fi) 195
 coral 62-3
 coral atolls 63
 costs 29-30
 coups, *see* conflict
 Craig Cove (Va) 791-2
 credit cards 830, *see also money in individual countries*
 cricket 53
 crocodiles 62, **308**
 Cross-Island Road (NMI) 379
 Cross-Island Track (CI) 444
 culture 50-9
 custom money 549, **618**
 customs 32, 53, 83

cycling
 Easter Island 95
 Fiji 191
 French Polynesia 607, 668
 Tonga 726
 Tuvalu 742
 Vanuatu 770
 within the South Pacific 843
 cyclones 29, 61

D
 Dakuniba (Fi) 199
 dance 56-7
 dangers 827-8, *see also* safety issues
 in individual countries
 de Bougainville, Louis-Antoine 43, 520, 582, 757
 de Galaup, Jean-François, *see* La Pérouse
 De Peyster, Arent 733
 decompression 73
 deforestation 65-8
 Denarau Island (Fi) 155, 7
 dengue fever 849-53
 d'Entrecasteaux, Antoine 689
 Des Voeux Peak (Fi) 203
 Devil's Cave (NC) 337
 disabled travellers 828
 divided church (CI) 464
 diving 69-78, 825
 American Samoa 530, 537
 certification 78
 Cook Islands 69-70, 444, 456-7
 decompression 73
 Easter Island 70, 95
 Federated States of Micronesia 75-6, 107-8, 116, 124, 131
 Fiji 70-1, 153, 165, 166, 167, 180, 191-2, 195, 202, 204, 207, 210, **11, 301**
 French Polynesia 71-2, 607, 621, 626-7, 629-30, 634-5, 645, 654, 668
 Guam 76, 229, 231-2, 238
 itineraries 36
 Kiribati 252, 261
 Marshall Islands 76-7, 275, 282
 New Caledonia 72, 316, 328, 330, 336, 345, 348
 Niue 72, 362
 Northern Mariana Islands 380, 386, 389
 Palau 77-8, 401, 405-6, 412, 416
 Samoa 73, 496, 509, 512

diving *continued*
 Solomon Islands 73-4, 558, 560, 573
 Tokelau 685
 Tonga 74, 698, 715, 726
 Vanuatu 74-5, 770, 793-5, 805
 Wallis & Futuna 816
 Dogleg Reef (Gu) 228
 dogs 528
 dolphin watching
 French Polynesia 607
 Palau 406
 dolphins 63, **614**
 Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra 42, 432, 544, 581
 Don Domingo de Boenechea 582
 drinks 80-1
 kava 82, **301**
 Drueulu (NC) 337
 Dublon Island (FSM) 123-4
 D-U-D Municipality (MI) 273-5, **274**
 dugong 63, 778
 Dulcie Atoll (PI) 428
 Dumbéa (NC) 316
 Dumbéa River (NC) 316
 d'Urville, Dumont 43
 Dwarf's Cave (Sa) 506-7

E
 Earhart, Amelia **753**
 Easter Island 84-97, **85**
 accommodation 94-5
 activities 95, *see also individual activity entries*
 attractions 90
 children, travel with 92
 culture 87-8
 embassies & consulates 96
 history 85
 Internet resources 96
 itineraries 90
 language 88
 money 96
 shopping 94
 telephone services 96
 tours 92
 travel to/from 97
 travel within 97
 visas 96-7
 Ebeye (MI) 278-81
 economy 37, 51-2
 Efate (Va) 764-77, **765**
 Egholo Cove (SI) 564
 Ekasup Cultural Village (Va) 769-70
 El Niño 61
 election riots 555
 Ellington Wharf (Fi) 175-6
 email services 829-30
 embassies 828-9, *see also individual countries*
 Ennewetok Atoll (MI) 282
 environmental issues 37, 65-8
 websites 68
 eosinophilic meningitis 849
 Epi (Va) 777-9, **777**
 Erakor (Va) 769
 Erromango (Va) 784
 Espiritu Santo (Va) 793-801, **794**
 Eten (FSM) 123
 Ethnic Art Village (FSM) 128-9, 12
 ethnic tension 550
 etiquette 32, 53, 83
 'Eua (To) 705-7
 'Euakafa (To) 723
 'Eue'iki (To) 723
 European explorers 41-3, 581, 757
 Bligh, William 424-5, 757
 Carteret, Philip 422, 544
 Cook, James 44, 86, 259, 297, 357, 432, 582, 689, 757
 de Bougainville, Louis-Antoine 43, 520, 582, 757
 de Galaup, Jean-François, *see* La Pérouse
 De Peyster, Arent 733
 d'Entrecasteaux, Antoine 689
 Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra 42, 432, 544, 581
 Don Domingo de Boenechea 582
 d'Urville, Dumont 43
 Fernández de Quirós, Pedro 42, 242, 420, 428, 432, 544, 581, 757
 Heyerdahl, Thor 85
 La Pérouse 86, 520, 689
 Le Maire, Jacques 42, 811
 Lemaire, Jacob 689
 Lopez de Legazpi, Miguel 219
 Lopez de Villalobos, Ruy 395
 Magellan, Ferdinand 42, 219
 Mourelle, Francisco Antonio 733
 Roggeveen, Jacob 42, 86, 520
 Schouten, Wilhelm 42, 811
 Tasman, Abel 42, 689
 Wallis, Samuel 43, 581, 689, 811
 exchange rates, *see inside front cover*

F
fa'alavelave 480
 Fafá Island (To) 705

Fafa O Sauai'i (Sa) 508
 Fagatogo market (AS) 525
 Faichuk Islands (FSM) 123
 Faioa (WF) 816
 Fais (FSM) 130
fakaleiti 690
 Fakaofu Atoll (TK) 683-4, **683**
 Fakarava (FP) 650-2
fale 682
 Falealupo Peninsula (Sa) 507-8
 Fanafo (Va) 799
 Fanning Island (Ki) 258-9
 Fare (FP) 612
 Farino (NC) 324-5
 Fat Man atomic bomb 384
fatele 737, **618**
 Fatu Hiva (FP) 662-3
 Fatumea Pool (Sa) 493
 Federated States of Micronesia 98-135, **100-1**
 accommodation 134
 activities 107-8, 116-17, 124, 131, 134, *see also individual activity entries*
 attractions 112-13, 113-14, 128-31
 best eating 103
 business hours 134
 children, travel with 108-9, 117, 124, 131, 134
 culture 101-2
 embassies & consulates 134
 history 99-101
 Internet resources 135
 itineraries 34, 103
 language 102
 money 135
 safety issues 120
 shopping 109, 119, 126, 133-4
 tours 109, 117, 125, 131-2
 travel to/from 135
 travel within 135
 visas 135
 Fefan Island (FSM) 123
 Fernández de Quirós, Pedro 42, 242, 420, 428, 432, 544, 581, 757
 Festival of Arts Week (FSM) 134
 Festival of Colours (Fi) 211
 Festival of Lights (Fi) 211
 Festival of Pacific Arts 31
 Festival of the Yam (NC) 350
 festivals & special events 31, *see also* festival
 Alele Week (MI) 285
 All-Micronesia Fishing Tournament (MI) 285

festivals & special events *continued*
 All Saints' Day (FP) 671
 Annual Flower Show (FP) 670
 Arrival of the First Missionaries (FP) 670
 Avocado Festival (NC) 350
 Back to My Roots Festival (Va) 789
 Bastille Day (NC) 350
 Beauty Contests (FP) 670
 Billabong Tahiti Pro Surfing Tournament (FP) 670
 Birth of Lord Rama (Fi) 211
 Bomb Day (Tu) 748
 Bon Année (Va) 778
 Bula Festival (Fi) 211
 Carnival (FP) 671
 Children's Day (Tu) 748
 Chinese New Year (FP) 670
 Circumcision Ceremonies (Va) 806
 Coconut Cup Sailing Regatta (MI) 285
 Commonwealth Day (Tu) 748
 Constitution Celebrations (CI) 473
 Constitution Celebrations (Ni) 365
 Constitution Day (Pa) 416
 Cross Island Relay (Va) 806
 Cultural Spirit Arts & Carving Exhibition (Va) 806
 Dancer of the Year (CI) 473
 Diwali (Fi) 211
 Earth Day (Pa) 416
 Équinoxe (NC) 350
 Fête du Boeuf (NC) 350
 Fiesta (Gu) 31
 Fiji Ocean Swim (Fi) 211
 Fiji Regatta Week (Fi) 181, 211
 Flag Day (AS) 538
 Flame Tree Arts Festival (NMI) 391
 Foire de Bourail (NC) 31, 350
 food 81
 Funafuti Youth Day (Tu) 748
 Giant Omelette Festival (NC) 350
 Gospel Day (CI) 473
 Gospel Day (Tu) 748
 Guam Discovery Day (Gu) 239
 Hawaiki Nui Va'a (FP) 31, 671
 Heilala Festival (To) 728
 Heiva i Tahiti (FP) 670
 Hibiscus Festival (Fi) 211
 Hindu Holi (Fi) 211
 Hindu Ritual Fire Walking (Fi) 211

Horse-Racing Carnivals (Va) 806
 Hurricane Day (Tu) 748
 independence celebrations (Sa) 514
 Independence Day (Pa) 416
 Independence Day (SI) 575
 Independence Day (Tu) 748
 Independence Day (Va) 806
 Jon Frum Day (Va) 806
 La Foa Film Festival (NC) 350
 Liberation Day (FSM) 134
 Liberation Day (Gu) 239
 Liberation Day Festival (NMI) 391
 Live en Août (NC) 350
 Marathon Internationale de Noumea (NC) 350
 Marquesas Festival (FP) 671
 Micronesian Games 37
 Micronesian Open Boardsailing Regatta (NMI) 391
 Mini Games (Va) 806
 Miss Galaxy Pageant (To) 31, 728
 Miss Heiva i Tahiti (FP) 670
 Miss Tahiti contest (FP) 670
 Musket Cove to Port Vila yacht race (Fi) 181
 Naghol (Va) 31, 806, 620
 National Fisherman's Day (MI) 285
 National Tourism Week (AS) 538
 Nekowiar (Va) 779, 806
 New Year's Eve Block Party (MI) 285
 Noumea Contemporary Art Biennale (NC) 350
 Olechotel Belau Fair (Pa) 416, 8
 Pacific Island Sevens Tournaments (CI, Fi & Sa) 31
 Pacific Tri-Nations 52-3
 Peniamina Day (Ni) 366
 Play of Rama (Fi) 211
 President's Cup 285
 Prince Charles' Birthday (Tu) 748
 Queen's Birthday (Tu) 748
 Ram Leela (Fi) 211
 Ram Naumi (Fi) 211
 Rise of Palolo (Sa) 31
 Rota Blue Triathlon (NMI) 391
 St Pierre Chanel Day (WF) 820
 saints' festivals (NMI) 391
 Saipan Laguna Regatta (NMI) 391
 Senior Citizens Day (Pa) 416
 show days (Ni) 366
 Sound & Light Show (NC) 350
 South Pacific Games 31, 514
 Sugar Festival (Fi) 211

Tagaman Triathlon (NMI) 391
 Tahiti International Golf Open (FP) 670
 Tahiti Nui Marathon (FP) 670
 Tapati Rapa Nui 96
 Taste of the Marianas (NMI) 391
 Tattoo Festival (AS) 538
 Teuila Festival (Sa) 514
 Tiare (Floral) Festival Week (CI) 473
 Tiare Tahiti Days (FP) 671
 Toka Ceremony (Va) 779, 806
 Tour de Tinian (NMI) 391
 White Sunday (AS) 538
 White Sunday (Sa) 514
 Yam Festival (Va) 806
 Youth Day (Pa) 416
fiatfa 482, 503, 533, 12, 617
 Fiji 136-216, **137**, 7
 accommodation 209-10
 activities 153, 167, 180, 210, *see also individual activity entries*
 attractions 151-3, 166-7, 190-1, 195
 best eating 145
 business hours 211
 children, travel with 150-1, 211
 culture 141, 143, 144, 209
 embassies & consulates 211
 history 138-41
 Internet access 211
 Internet resources 211-12
 itineraries 146
 language 144-5
 money 212
 safety issues 147, 207
 shopping 157, 164, 174-5, 198
 telephone services 212
 time 213
 tours 151, 163, 165, 170, 180, 185-6, 192, 195
 travel to/from 213-14
 travel within 214-16
 visas 213
 film industry 221
 fire walking 211
 Fish Eye Marine Park (Gu) 227
 fishing 825
 American Samoa 530
 Cook Islands 444
 Federated States of Micronesia 131
 Guam 232
 Kiribati 251, 261
 Marshall Islands 275, 282
 New Caledonia 328, 348
 Niue 362, 363

fishing *continued*
 Palau 401-2
 Samoa 512
 Solomon Islands 573
 Tonga 698, 715, 726
 Vanuatu 770, 778, 795, 805
 Foa (To) 710
 Foe'ata (To) 722
 Foelifuka (To) 722
 Fofoa (To) 722
 Foire de Bourail 31
 Fongafale Islet (Tu) 741
 Fono (AS) 525
 food 79-80, 82
 customs 83
 festivals 81
 restaurants 81
 vegetarian travellers 81
 football 53
 Fort Soledad (Gu) 229, **304**
 French Polynesia 579-678, **580**
 accommodation 583, 666-8, 613
 activities 597-9, 607-8, 621-2, 626-7, 629-30, 634-5, 641, 668-9, *see also individual activity entries*
 best eating 589
 business hours 669
 children, travel with 600, 669-70
 culture 585-9, 613
 embassies & consulates 670
 gay travellers 671
 history 581-5
 Internet access 671
 Internet resources 671
 itineraries 590
 language 588-9
 lesbian travellers 671
 money 671
 planning 583, 640, 652
 shopping 604, 610, 629, 639
 telephone services 672
 time 672
 tourist information 672
 tours 600, 622, 627, 630
 travel to/from 673-5
 travel within 675-8
 visas 672-3
 women travellers 673
 Friendly Islands 689
 Frum, Jon 783
 Funafala Islet (Tu) 743
 Funafuti Atoll (Tu) 739-44, **739**
 Futuna Island (WF) 817-19, **818**

G
 Gaan Point (Gu) 228
 Gadao 230
 Gadao's Cave (Gu) 230
 galleries, *see* museums & galleries
 Gambier Archipelago (FP) 665-6, **665**
 Garapan (NMI) 375-7
 Garden of the Sleeping Giant (Fi) 153
 Gaua (Va) 803
 Gauguin, Paul 658, 659
 gay travellers 829, *see also individual countries*
 Gef Pa'Go Chamorro Cultural Village (Gu) 230
 geography 60
 German Cable Station (FSM) 129
 Ghizo (SI) 559-62, **560**
 Gizo Island (SI) 559-62
 global warming 37, 66-7
 golf
 American Samoa 530
 Fiji 153, 164-5
 Samoa 496
 Vanuatu 795
 Governor Joseph F Flores Beach Park (Gu) 225
 GR1 Walking Track (NC) 323
 Grande Terre (NC) 321-32, **322**, **328**
grandes cases 299
 Grotte de Kong Houloup (NC) 339
 Grotte de la Reine Hortense (NC) 345
 Grotte de la Troisième (NC) 344
 Grotte de Lindéralique (NC) 330
 Grotte du Diable (NC) 337
 Grotte les Joyaux de Luengoni (NC) 337
 Grotto (NMI) 378-9
 Guadalcanal (SI) 550-7, **552-3**
 Guam 217-40, **218**
 accommodation 237
 activities 231-2, 238, *see also individual activity entries*
 attractions 223-30
 best eating 220
 business hours 239
 children, travel with 232
 culture 220, 221
 embassies & consulates 239
 food 235
 history 219-20
 Internet resources 239
 itineraries 34, 222
 language 221
 money 222, 239
 safety issues 222
 shopping 237
 tours 232-3
 travel to/from 239-40
 travel within 240
 visas 239
 Guano Islands Act 752
 Guguegue (MI) 279
 Gurava (SI) 562
H
 Haakuti (FP) 658
 Haamene (FP) 629
 Ha'amonga 'a Maui trilithon (To) 703, 619
 Ha'ano (To) 710-11
 Ha'apai Group (To) 707-12
 Hafeva (To) 711
 Hagātña (Gu) 223-5, **223**
 walking tour **224**
 hair styles 161
 Hakahetau (FP) 658
 Hakamaia (FP) 658
 Hakatao (FP) 658
 Hakupu (Ni) 361
 Hall Islands (FSM) 124
 Hanapaaao (FP) 660
 Hanavave (FP) 662
 handicrafts 434-5, 737
 Hanga Roa (EI) 88-94, **89**
 Hapatonii (FP) 661
 Hart, Charles 'Bloody' 116
 Hauru Point (FP) 607
 Hayes, 'Bully' 104
 health 845-53
 Henderson Island (PI) 427
 hepatitis 849
 Heyerdahl, Thor 85
 Hideaway Island (Va) 769
 Hienghène (NC) 329, 330
 Highland Paradise (CI) 441-2
 hiking 825
 American Samoa 530, 536, 537
 Cook Islands 444-5
 Easter Island 95
 Federated States of Micronesia 108, 117
 Fiji 206, 207, 210
 French Polynesia 597, 607, 621-2, 627, 635, 641, 654, 656, 660, 668
 GR1 Walking Track (NC) 323
 Guam 232, 238
 itineraries 36
 New Caledonia 325, 329, 331, 348

hiking *continued*
 Northern Mariana Islands 380
 Samoa 496, 509, 512
 Solomon Islands 573
 Tonga 726
 Vanuatu 770, 788, 795, 805
 Hikutavake (Ni) 360
 Hinduism 54, 151
 Hiroshima 384
 history 39-49
 hitching 843-4
 Hiti people 567
 HIV 37, 849
 Hiva Oa (FP) 658-61, **659**
 Hnathalo (NC) 337
 Hohoi (FP) 658
 Hokatu (FP) 656
 holidays 29, 829, *see also individual countries*
 homosexuality 52
 Honiara (SI) 553-5, **554**
 Hooumi (FP) 653
 horse riding
 Cook Islands 445
 Easter Island 95
 French Polynesia 607, 621, 627,
 635, 654, 656, 660, 668
 New Caledonia 325, 327, 348
 Vanuatu 770, 795
 hotspots 47
 Howland Island (UST) 752
 Huahine (FP) 610-23, **611**
 Huahine Iti (FP) 621
 Huahine Nui (FP) 612-21
 Hunga (To) 722
 Hutuna (SI) 567

I

ie toga 483
 Île des Pins (NC) 342-7, **343**, 6
 Île Fenua Fo'ou (WF) 816
 Îlot de Tibarama (NC) 330
 Îlot Ténia (NC) 324
 Imai (Va) 781
 Inarajan (Gu) 230
 Independent Samoa 479
 Indo-Fijian history & culture 140-1, 12
 insurance 829
 International Date Line 247
 International Women's Development
 Agency (IWDA) 142, 547

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages

Internet access 829-30,
see also individual countries
 Internet resources 31
 health 846-7
 tickets 838
 Ipai (Va) 781
 Ipayato (Va) 801
 Iririki (Va) 769
 Islam 54
 Island Nights 452, 457
 itineraries 33-6
 authors' favourite trip 22
 diving 36
 hiking 36
 Micronesian 34
 Pacific 33
 remote 35

J

Jaluit Atoll (MI) 282-3
 Japanese B encephalitis 849-50
 Japanese lighthouse (FSM) 123
 Japanese soldiers 410, 562
 Japanese Zeroes (FSM) 129
 Jarvis Island (UST) 753
 Jellyfish Lake (Pa) 405, **308**
 Jewels of Luengoni (NC) 337
 Johnston Atoll (UST) 754
 Jokin (NC) 336
 Jon Frum Movement 783

K

Kadavu (FI) 207-9, **208**
 Kalau (To) 722
 Kao (To) 711-12
 Kapa (To) 723
 Kapingamarangi Atoll (FSM) 116
kastom mani 549, 618
 kava 82, **301**
 kayaking
 Federated States of
 Micronesia 108
 Fiji 186, 207, 210
 Palau 406, 416
 Samoa 496
 Tonga 716-17
 Vanuatu 775
 Kayangel (Pa) **415**
 Kennedy Island (SI) 562
 Kenutu (To) 723
 Kia (SI) 562
kilikiti 53, 682
 Kingman Reef (UST) **753-4**
 Kings Road (Fi) 175-7
 Kioa (Fi) 200

Kiribati 241-65, **242-3**
 accommodation 262
 activities 251-2, 260-1, 262,
see also individual activity entries
 attractions 250-1, 260-1
 business hours 262
 children, travel with 263
 culture 244, 245, 246, 255
 embassies & consulates 263
 history 242
 Internet access 263
 Internet resources 263
 itineraries 253
 language 246
 money 263
 shopping 254
 telephone services 263-4
 tours 251, 264-5
 travel to/from 264-5
 travel within 265
 visas 264
 women travellers 264

kirikiti 53, 481
 Klouklubed (Pa) 411
 Kolombangara (SI) 562
 Kolonia (FSM) 111-13, **111**
 walking tour 112-13, **112**
 Koné (NC) 327
 Korolevu (Fi) 162-4
 Koror Island (Pa) 400-1, **400**
 Koror State (Pa) 398-404, **399**
 Korotogo (Fi) 162-4
 Kosrae (FSM) 103-9, **104**
 Kosrae State Fair (FSM) 134
 Koumac (NC) 327
 Kuata (Fi) 186
kumara 64-5
 Kuto (NC) 344
 Kwaio people 572
 Kwaio Rebellion 545
 Kwajalein Atoll (MI) 278-80, **279**
 Kwajalein Island (MI) 278

L

La Foa (NC) 324-5
 La Grotte de Pethoen (NC) 333
 La Pérouse 86, 520, 689
 La Roche (NC) 325, 334
 Labasa (Fi) 199
 Lakatoro (Va) 787
 Lake Lalolalo (WF) 816
 Lake Lanoto'o (Sa) 493
 Lake Lanutavake (WF) 816
 Lake Tagimaucia (Fi) 203

Lake Te'Nggano (SI) 567
 Lakepa (NI) 361
 Lalinda (Va) 792
 Lamap (Va) 788-9
 Lamen Bay (Va) 778
 land-diving 802, 802-4, **620**
 Langa Langa Lagoon (SI) 571
 Langer Island (FSM) 115
lanita 53
 Lapaha (To) 703
 Lapita people 39, 138, 478, 757
 Last Japanese Command Post (NMI)
 378
 latte stones 224, 225, 380, 383, 389
 Lau Group (Fi) 209
 Lau Lagoon (SI) 572
 Laura (MI) 275
 Lautoka (Fi) 158-60, **158**
 Lava Field (Sa) 506
 Le Bone de la Léproserie (NC) 333
 Le Maire, Jacques 42, 811
 Le Petit Train (NC) 315
 Le Saut du Guerrier (NC) 334
 Leava (WF) 817-19
 Lékine (NC) 339
 Lékiny (NC) 339
 Leleuvia (Fi) 193
 Lelu Island (FSM) 105-6, **106**
 Lelu ruins (FSM) 105-6
 Lemaire, Jacob 689
 Lenakel (Va) 781
 Leone (AS) 529
 leptospirosis 850
 lesbian travellers 829,
see also individual countries
 Levuka (Fi) 190-3, **191**
 Lifou (NC) 335-9, **336**
 Lifuka (To) 708-10
 Lifuka Group (To) 708-11
 Likiep Atoll (MI) 283
 Lilisiana (SI) 570
 Limu Pools (Ni) 360
 Lindéralique rocks (NC) 330
 literature 30, 56
 Litslits (Va) 787
 Little Boy atomic bomb 384
 Lola (SI) 563
 Lolo (To) 723
 Lomaiviti Group (Fi) 190-4
 Lomaloma (Fi) 209
 Lopez de Legazpi, Miguel 219
 Lopez de Villalobos, Ruy 395
 love sticks 125
 Lovcraft, HP 102, 115
 Loyalty Islands (NC) 332-41

Luganville (Va) 796-9, **797**
 Luma (AS) 536
 Luminao Reef (Gu) 228
 Lysepsep people 796

M

Ma'ama'a Cove (AS) 528
 macaques 413
 Maeva (FP) 621
 Maewo (Va) 803
 Maga Point (AS) 535
 Magellan, Ferdinand 42, 219
 Magellan monument (Gu) 229
 magic 123, 789
mahu 585
mahute, *see tapa*
 Majuro Atoll (MI) 271-8, **272**
makatea 663, **614**
 Makin (Ki) 258
 Mala (To) 722
 Malaita Island (SI) 569-72
 Malaita Province (SI) 569-72, **570**
 Malakal Island (Pa) 401
 malaria 850
 Malekula (Va) 785-9, **786**
 Malem (FSM) 106
 Maloelap Atoll (MI) 283
 Malolo (Fi) 182
 Malololailai (Fi) 181-2
 Malu'u (SI) 571
 Malwepe (Va) 799
 Mamanuca Group (Fi) 178-84, **179**
 Mana (Fi) 183
 Mana (SI) 557
 Mana Ruukwaka (SI) 571
 Mañagaha Island (NMI) 377
maneaba 245
 Mangaia (CI) 467-70, **468**
 Mangalonga (Mana) (SI) 557
 Manihi (FP) 648-50
 Manihiki (CI) 470
 Manono (Sa) 495
 manta rays 131
 Manu'a Islands (AS) 534-7
 Manuae (CI) 459
 Mapu'a 'a Vaca (To) 704
marae
 Cook Islands 462, 465, 466-7,
 468-9
 French Polynesia 596-7, 607, 621,
 626, 634
 Marau Sound (SI) 557
 Maré (NC) 332-5, **333**
 Marine Lakes (Pa) 405
 Mariner, William 708

market (NC) 315
 Marovo Lagoon (SI) 564-7, **565**
 Marquesas Islands (FP) 651-62, **651**
 Marshall Islands 266-87, **267**
 accommodation 284
 activities 275, 282-5, 284, *see also individual activity entries*
 attractions 279
 best eating 270
 business hours 285
 children, travel with 285
 culture 269-70, 280, **305**
 embassies & consulates 285
 history 267-9
 Internet access 285
 Internet resources 285
 itineraries 271
 language 271
 money 285
 shopping 278
 telephone services 286
 time 286
 travel to/from 286
 travel within 286
 visas 286

Masefau (AS) 528
masi, *see tapa*
 Maskelyne (Va) 789
 Massacre Bay (AS) 529
 Matakawalevu (Fi) 189
 Matafao Peak (AS) 528
 Matagi (Fi) 206
 Matahenua (SI) 568
 Mataiva (FP) 648
 Matamanoa (Fi) 183-4
 Mata'olealelo Spring (Sa) 507
 Matapa Chasm (Ni) 361
 Mata'Utu (WF) 815
 Matavera (CI) 443
 Matei (Fi) 204
 Matevulu Blue Hole (Va) 799
 Matikuri (SI) 566
 Maui 54
 Maui's Burden trillithon (To) 703, **619**
 Ma'uke (CI) 463-5, **464**
 Maungapu (CI) 456
 Maupiti (FP) 639-42, **639**
 Mbasakana Island (SI) 571
 Mbita'ama (SI) 571
 medical services 366, 847-53
 megapodes 558, 562, 725
 Menka ruins (FSM) 107
 Merizo (Gu) 229
 metric conversions, *see inside front cover*

Michi (SI) 566
 Mili Atoll (MI) 283
 military history 280
 Milky Way (Pa) 405
 Millennium Cave (Va) 799
 millennium celebrations 247
 Minerva Reef (To) 707
 Mitiaro (CI) 465-7, **466**
moai 91, 6
Moby Dick 428
 Mokil Atoll (FSM) 116
 Momi Bay (Fi) 160
 money 29-30, 830-1,
see also individual countries
 moneychangers 831
 Mont Panié (NC) 329, 331
 Monts Koghi (NC) 316
 Mo'orea (FP) 604-10, **605**
 Mortlocks Island (FSM) 124
 Moso's Footprint (Sa) 507-8
 mosquitoes 828
 Mother & Child Stone (Pa) 400-1
 Motopu (FP) 661
 motorcycle travel 843
motu 260, 640-1
 Mt Alava (AS) 525
 Mt Austen (SI) 557
 Mt Bau (SI) 563
 Mt Jumullong Manglo (Gu) 229
 Mt Lamam (Gu) 229
 Mt Longguoreke (SI) 564
 Mt Lulu Fakahega (WF) 815
 Mt Matavanu Crater (Sa) 506-7
 Mt Silisili (Sa) 507
 Mt Tonaachaw (FSM) 122-3
 Mt Tumutumu (AS) 535
 Mt Vaea Scenic Reserve (Sa) 492
 Mt Yasur (Va) 781, 10
 Mounu (To) 723
 Mourelle, Francisco Antonio 733
 Mu'a (To) 703
 Munda (SI) 562-3
 Muri (CI) 443
 walking tour 443
 museums & galleries
 Afa Historical Museum (To) 709
 Alele Museum & Public Library
 (MI) 274
 Art Studio gallery (CI) 441
 Beachcomber Gallery (CI) 441
 Belau National Museum (Pa) 400

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages

CNMI Museum of History & Culture
 (NMI) 377
 Cook Islands Library & Museum
 Society (CI) 441
 Etpison Museum (Pa) 400
 Fiji Museum (Fi) 166-77, 190, 9
 Galerie van der Heyde (FP) 606
 Jean P Haydon Museum (AS) 525
 Kaha Art & Gallery (Gu) 226
 Kosrae Museum (FSM) 105
 Musée de Bourail (NC) 325
 Musée de la Marine (FP) 634
 Musée de la Ville de Noumea
 (NC) 314
 Musée de l'Histoire Maritime
 (NC) 315
 Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie
 (NC) 314
 Musée de Tahiti et des Îles (FP)
 597
 Musée Gauguin (FP) 596
 Museo Antropológico Sebastián
 Englert (EI) 90
 museum of WWII relics (SI) 563
 National Museum (CI) 441
 National Museum & Cultural
 Centre (SI) 555
 National Museum of Vanuatu
 (Va) 767
 Oceania Centre for Arts & Culture
 (Fi) 167
 Pacific Arts gallery (CI) 441
 Robert Louis Stevenson Museum
 (Sa) 492
 Talofofo Falls (Gu) 231
 Thio mining museum (NC) 325
 Tongan National Centre (To) 695
 Umwanibong Cultural Centre
 (Ki) 250
 Yap Art Studio & Gallery (FSM) 129
 music 56-7
 Musket Cove Marina (Fi) 181, **301**
 Mwā Ka (NC) 314-15
 Mystery Island (Va) 784

N
 Naag Mandir Temple (Fi) 199
 Nacula (Fi) 188-9
 Nadarivatu (Fi) 177
 Nadi (Fi) 151-7, **152**
 Nagasaki 384
 Nagriamel movement 799
 Naigani (Fi) 193-4
 Namenalala (Fi) 194
 Namosi Highlands (Fi) 178

Namotu (Fi) 184
 Nan Madol (FSM) 114-15, **114**, **303**
 Nananu-i-Ra (Fi) 176-7
 Nanumaga Atoll (Tu) 746
 Nanumea Atoll (Tu) 746
 Nanuya Lailai (Fi) 189
 Natadola Beach (Fi) 160-1
 national parks 65, 691-2
 A'opo Conservation Area (Sa) 507
 Bouma National Heritage Park
 (Fi) 206
 Colo-i-Suva Forest Park (Fi) 167
 'Eua National Park (To) 692
 Fagatele Bay National Marine
 Sanctuary (AS) 529
 Falealupo Rainforest Preserve
 (Sa) 507
 Funafuti Conservation Area (Tu) 742
 Ha'amonga Trilithon Reserve
 (To) 692
 Johnston Atoll (UST) 754
 Koroyanitu National Heritage Park
 (Fi) 177-8
 Kula Eco Park (Fi) 163
 Libanese Protected Area (Va) 788
 Loru Conservation Park (Va) 800
 Mt Talau National Park (To) 692,
 714
 National Park of American Samoa
 (AS) 527, 535
 O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park
 (Sa) 494
 Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue
 (NC) 321-2
 Parque Nacional Rapa Nui (EI) 90-2
 Ringi Te Suh Marine Conservation
 Area (Va) 789
 Ritidian Point (Gu) 226
 Tafua Peninsula Rainforest
 Preserve (Sa) 508-9
 Uafato Conservation Area (Sa) 493
 Utwe-Walung Marine Park (FSM)
 107
 Vathe Conservation Area (Va) 800
 Waitabu Marine Park (Fi) 206
 Nauru 288-95, **289**
 accommodation 294
 activities 293-4, *see also individual*
activity entries
 attractions 293-4
 business hours 294
 culture 291-2, 294
 embassies & consulates 294
 history 289-91
 Internet access 295

Nauru *continued*
 Internet resources 295
 language 293
 money 295
 telephone services 295
 time 295
 travel to/from 295
 travel within 295
 visas 295
 Nausori (Fi) 175
 Nausori Highlands (Fi) 178
 Navai (Fi) 177
 Navala (Fi) 178, **302**
 navigation 40-1
 Navini (Fi) 181
 Naviti (Fi) 187
 Ndunde (SI) 562
 Neco Island (Pa) 405
 Neiafu (To) 714-21, **716-17**
 netball 53
 New Caledonia 296-355, **297**
 accommodation 347
 activities 316, 347-9,
see also individual activity entries
 attractions 314-15
 best eating 309
 business hours 349
 children, travel with 316-17, 349
 culture 299-300, 8
 embassies & consulates 349-50
 food 347
 history 297-9
 Internet access 350
 Internet resources 350
 itineraries 310
 language 309
 money 350-1
 safety issues 342, 349
 shopping 321, 347
 sports 300, *see also individual*
sports
 telephone services 351
 time 351
 tourist information 351
 tours 316, 317, 323, 334, 337, 340,
 345, 355
 travel to/from 351-3
 travel within 353-5
 visas 351
 New Georgia Island (SI) 562-4
 New Zealand War Cemetery (NC) 325
 Ngaon te Taake (Ki) 260
 Ngaraard State (Pa) 409
 Ngarchelong State (Pa) 409
 Ngau (To) 723

Nggabengga (SI) 568
 Nggatokae (SI) 566-7
 Nggela Islands (SI) 557-8
 Nguna (Va) 776-81
nguzunguzu 548
 Niua Group (To) 724-5
 Niuafo'ou (To) 725
 Niuaotupapu (To) 724-5
 Niue 356-67, **358**
 activities 362, *see also individual*
activity entries
 best eating 359
 business hours 365
 children, travel with 362-3
 culture 357-9
 history 357
 Internet access 366
 Internet resources 366
 language 359
 money 366
 postal services 366
 telephone services 366
 time 366
 tourist information 366-7
 tours 363
 travel to/from 367
 travel within 367
 visas 367
 Niulakita (Tu) 747
 Niutao Atoll (Tu) 746
 noddies 293
 Nomuka (To) 711
nono 652
 Noro (SI) 563
 Northern Mariana Islands 368-92, **369**
 accommodation 390
 activities 380, 386, 389, 390, *see*
also individual activity entries
 business hours 390
 children, travel with 380, 391
 culture 371
 embassies & consulates 391
 history 369-70
 Internet resources 391
 itineraries 34, 374
 language 371-2
 money 391
 safety issues 373-4
 shopping 382, 390
 telephone services 391
 time 391
 tours 380-1
 travel to/from 392
 travel within 392
 visas 391

Noumea (NC) 310-21, **312-13**,
318-19
 walking tour 313-14, **314**
 Nuapapu (To) 722
 nuclear testing 68, 259, 268, 281,
 282, 283-4
 Nui Atoll (Tu) 746
 Nuku (To) 723
 Nuku Hiva (FP) 652-5, **653**
 Nukuaeta (WF) 816
 Nuku'alofa (To) 695-702, **696-7**
 Nukufetau Atoll (Tu) 744-5
 Nukufotu (WF) 816
 Nukulaelae Atoll (Tu) 746-7
 Nukulua (WF) 816
 Nukunamo (To) 710
 Nukunonu Atoll (TK) 683-4, **683**
 Nukuoro Atoll (FSM) 116
 Numuka'iki (To) 711
 Nunulafa (SI) 572
 Nusa Hope Island (SI) 563
 Nusa Roviana (SI) 563

O
 Octopus Cave (SI) 567
 Oeno Island (PI) 427
 Office of the Senate Legislature
 (AS) 525
 Ofu (AS) 534-5, **535**
 'Ofu (To) 723
 Okau Village (FSM) 129
 O'Keefe, David 102, 128
 Old Japanese Jail (NMI) 377, **304**
 Olosega (AS) 535
 Omoa (FP) 662
 Onotoa (Ki) 258
 Opunohu Bay (FP) 606
 Opunohu Valley (FP) 607
 Orolok Atoll (FSM) 116
 Ouégoa (NC) 331
 Ou'taha (SI) 568
 Ouvéa (NC) 339-42, **340**
 Ovalau (Fi) 190-4
 'Ovalau (To) 723
 overfishing 37
 Oyster Island (Va) 799

P
 Pa Na Ghundu (SI) 562
 Pa Na Ulu (SI) 562
 package tours 673
 Pacific Harbour (Fi) 164-6
 Pacific Islands Forum 37
 Pacific Solution 292
 Pago Bay (Gu) 231

Pago Pago (AS) 525-33, **526**
 walking tour 526-7, **527**
 Pailongge (SI) 562
 Pakin Atoll (FSM) 116
 Pala Lake (AS) 528
 Palaha Cave (NI) 360
 Palau 393-418, **394**
 accommodation 416
 activities 401, 405, 409, 412,
 416, *see also individual activity*
entries
 best eating 396
 business hours 416
 children, travel with 402, 416
 culture 396, 397
 embassies & consulates 416
 history 395-6
 Internet access 417
 Internet resources 417
 itineraries 34, 398
 language 397
 money 417
 sports 396-7, *see also individual*
sports
 telephone services 417
 time 417
 tours 402, 406, 409, 412
 travel to/from 417
 travel within 417-18
 visas 417
 Palau Aquarium (Pa) 400
 Palikir (FSM) 114
 Palmerston (CI) 460
 Palmyra Atoll (UST) **753**
 pandanus 275
 Pangaimotu (To) 704-5, 722
 Paonangsu (Va) 776
 Paopao (FP) 606
 Paopao Valley (FP) 607
 Papase'e Sliding Rock (Sa) 495
 Pape'ete (FP) 595, **594-5, 598-9**
 walking tour 595, **596**
 Pau (To) 723
 Peace Park (MI) 275
 Pe'ape'a Cave (Sa) 507
 Peleliu (Pa) 410-13, **411**
 Peng (NC) 337
 Penrhyn (CI) 470-1
 Pentecost (Va) 801-4, **801**
 petroglyphs (Fi) 199, 634, 656, 613
 Phoenix Islands (Ki) 262

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages

phone codes 832, *see also individual*
countries
 phonecards 832, *see also telephone*
services in individual countries
 phosphate 290
 Pic N'ga (NC) 344
 Picnic Islands (FSM) 123
 Pingelap Atoll (FSM) 116
 pirogues 344
 Pitcairn Island 419-30, **420, 423**
 accommodation 428
 attractions 426
 culture 420-2
 history 420, 422, 428
 Internet resources 428-9
 language 422
 money 429
 shopping 426
 telephone services 429
 time 429
 travel to/from 429-30
 travel within 426-7
 visas 429
 Pitcairn Island trials 421
 Place des Cocotiers (NC) 314, 306
 place names 300, 427
 planning 28-32
 health 845-7
 plants 64-5, *see also individual*
plants
 Pohnpei (FSM) 109-19, **110**
 Poindimié (NC) 329, 330
 Point Vénus (FP) 596
 Polaris Point (Gu) 228
 Pola Tai (AS) 527
 Pomare dynasty 583-4, 596
 population 37, 52
 Porakiet Village (FSM) 113
 Port Boisé (NC) 323
 Port Resolution (Va) 783
 Port Sandwich (Va) 788
 Port Vatu (Va) 792
 Port Vila (Va) 766-75, **768**
 walking tour 767, **767**
 postal services 832, *see also individual*
countries
 Pouébo (NC) 330-1
 Pouembout (NC) 327
 Poule Couveuse (NC) 330
 princess's royal residence (To) 703
 Prony (NC) 323
 Puamau (FP) 660
 Pukapuka (CI) 471
 Pulemelei Mound (Sa) 508
 Puntan Dos Amantes (Gu) 225-6

Puruto, Piri 445
 Pwusehn Malek (FSM) 114

Q

Qamea (Fi) 207
 Qilaqila (Fi) 209

R

Rabi Island resettlement 258
 rafting 210
 rai, *see* stone money
 Ra'iatea (FP) 623-31, 626-9, **624**
 Rainmaker Mountain (AS) 527
 Raivavae (FP) 665
 Rakahanga (CI) 470
 Rakiraki (FI) 175-6
 Ramata (SI) 566
 Rangimotia (CI) 469
 Rangiroa (FP) 642-7, **644**
 Ranon (Va) 792
 Ranongga (SI) 562
 Rarotonga (CI) 436-54, **438-9**,
see also Cook Islands
 Red Lake (AS) 528
 religion 54
 Rendova (SI) 564
 Rendova Peak (SI) 564
 Rennell & Bellona Province (SI) 567-9
 Rennell Island (SI) 567-8, **568**
 responsible travel 506
 restaurants 81
 Riba Cave (SI) 571
 Righuru (SI) 562
 Rikitea (FP) 666
 Rini, Snyder 546
 riots, *see* conflict
 road construction 408
 Robinson Crusoe Island (Fi) 160
 Rock House (Sa) 507-8
 Rock Islands (Pa) 404-7, 308
 rock that went to Australia (Va) 778
 Roggeveen, Jacob 42, 86, 520
 Rom dance 791
 Rongelap Atoll (MI) 283-4
 Rota (NMI) 386-90, **387**
 Rotuma (Fi) 189-90
 Roviana Lagoon (SI) 563
 Royal Hotel (Fi) 191
 rugby union 52-3
 Rurutu (FP) 663-4, **664**
 Russell Islands (SI) 558

S
 Saamoa Cave (SI) 568
 Saeraghi (SI) 562

Sai'ilele (AS) 528
 sailing, *see* boating, yachting
 St Maurice statue (NC) 344, **306**
 St Pierre Chanel 812
 Saipan (NMI) 372-82, **373, 376**
 Saipan Incident 372
 sakau 119
 Salelologa (Sa) 506
 Samoa 477-518, **478**
 accommodation 511-12
 activities 496, 509, 512-13, *see*
also individual activity entries
 best eating 484
 business hours 513
 children, travel with 497, 513
 culture 480-3
 embassies & consulates 513
 history 478-80
 Internet access 514
 Internet resources 514
 itineraries 485
 language 483-4
 money 514-15
 shopping 503
 sports 482, *see also individual*
sports
 telephone services 515
 time 515
 tours 497, 509
 travel to/from 516-17
 travel within 517-18
 visas 515-16
 San Jose (NMI) 383-4, **385**
 sandalwood trading 46
 Santa Maria (Va) 803
 Santo Peak (Va) 800
 Sanwir (Va) 787
 Sapwuaifik Atoll (FSM) 116
 Sarraméa (NC) 324
 Saua site (AS) 536
 Saudeleurs 99
 Savai'i (Sa) 503-11, **504-5**
 Savo (SI) 558
 Savusavu (FI) 195-9
 Sawa-i-Lau (Fi) 189
 scenic flights
 Fiji 153
 Schouten, Wilhelm 42, 811
 sculpture 58-9
 sculpture garden (NC) 324
 sea cucumbers 45-6
 sea snakes 64, 310
 Seghe (SI) 566
 Sella Bay Vista Point (Gu) 228-9
 Shabadrán (NC) 334

shark-calling rituals 572
 shark feeding 72
 Sharks Bay (Va) 783
 shipwrecks, *see* wrecks
 Sia Ko Kafoa (To) 721
 siapo 483, 813, *see also* tapa
 Sigatoka (Fi) 162
 Sigatoka Sand Dunes (Fi) 162
 Sigatoka Valley (Fi) 178
 Simbo (SI) 562
 Siviri (Va) 776
 Skull Island (SI) 564
 Sleeping Lady (FSM) 106
 Small Nambas people 785, 787, 789
 snorkelling
 American Samoa 530, 537
 Cook Islands 445, 456, 11
 Easter Island 95
 Federated States of Micronesia
 108, 116, 124-8, 131
 Fiji 202, 204, 210
 French Polynesia 607, 621, 626-7,
 629-30, 634-5, 641, 668
 Guam 228, 231-2, 238
 Kiribati 251
 Marshall Islands 275
 New Caledonia 348
 Niue 361, 362
 Northern Mariana Islands 380, 386
 Palau 401, 405-6, 412, 416
 Samoa 496, 512-13
 Solomon Islands 560, 573
 Tokelau 685
 Tonga 698, 715, 726
 Tuvalu 742
 Vanuatu 776, 789, 793-5
 Wallis & Futuna 816
 Society Islands (FP) 589, **590**
 Sokehs Island (FSM) 113
 Solomon Islands 542-78, **543**
 accommodation 572
 activities 560-1, 573-4,
see also individual activity
entries
 best eating 549
 business hours 574
 children, travel with 574
 culture 546-9
 embassies & consulates 574-5
 history 544-6
 Internet access 575
 Internet resources 575
 itineraries 551
 language 549
 money 575-6
 safety issues 552, 574
 shopping 557
 telephone services 576
 time 576
 tourist information 576
 tours 555, 563
 travel to/from 577
 travel within 577-8
 visas 576
 women travellers 576
 Somosomo (Fi) 202-4
 Songsong (NMI) 387-8, **388**
 South Cape blow hole (Fi) 204
 South Pacific Memorial Park (Gu) 227
 South Sea Island (Fi) 180
 South-West Islands (Pa) 415-16
 sports 52-3, *see also individual sports*
 Sri Siva Subramaniya Swami Temple
 (Fi) 151-3
 star mounds (AS) 529
 Stevens, Jimmy 799
 Stevenson, Robert Louis 30, 56, 482,
 484, 492
 stick charts 269
 Stone Dog (SI) 563
 stone money 130, 303
 storyboard art 397
 submarining 238
 Sugar King Park (NMI) 375-7
 Suicide Cliff (NMI) 378, 384
 Sulphur Bay (Va) 782
 sunken village (Fi) 193
 sup sup 547
 surfing 825
 American Samoa 530, 538
 Cook Islands 445
 Easter Island 95
 Federated States of Micronesia
 108, 117
 Fiji 162, 166, 182, 207, 210
 French Polynesia 597-8, 621,
 668-9
 Guam 232
 Samoa 496, 509, 513
 Solomon Islands 560, 573
 Tonga 698
 Suva (Fi) 166-75, **168-9**
 walking tour 167-70, **170**
 Suwarrow (CI) 471
 sweet potato 64-5
 swimming
 American Samoa 530, 537
 Cook Islands 445, 456
 Federated States of Micronesia
 108, 131

swimming *continued*

- Fiji 167
- French Polynesia 599, 607, 621, 614
- Kiribati 251
- safety 828
- Samoa 496, 512-13
- Vanuatu 805

T

- Tabiteuea (Ki) 258
- Tabuaeran Island (Ki) 258-9
- Tadine (NC) 333-4
- Tafunsak (FSM) 107
- Tagaloa 534
- Taha'a (FP) 623-31, 629-31, **624**
- Taharaa Point (FP) 596
- Tahiti (FP) 590-604, **592-3**, 6
- Tahiti Iti (FP) 597
- Tahiti Nui (FP) 596-7
- Tahuata (FP) 661-2, **659**
- Taiohae (FP) 652, **654**
- Takapoto (FP) 650
- Takara (Va) 775-6
- Takaroa (FP) 650
- Talava Arches (Ni) 361, **615**
- Taleyfac Bridge (Gu) 228
- Talietumu archaeological site (WF) 816
- Talao (Va) 776
- Tamana (Ki) 258
- tamtam* 762, 620
- Tamuning (Gu) 222, **226**
- Tanna (Va) 779-85, **780**
- tapa 57-8, 144, 691
- Tapuaeta'i (Ci) 456, **616**
- Tapuna Cave (Si) 568
- Tarawa (Ki) 247-55, **248**
- Tarawa Atoll (Ki) 247-55
- taro 79-80
- Tasiriki (Va) 800
- Tasman, Abel 42, 689
- tattooing 58, 483, 548
- Ta'u (AS) 535-6, **536**
- Taufusteale Taro Marshes (AS) 528
- Taunga (To) 723
- Tavarua (Fi) 184
- Taveuni (Fi) 200-7, **201**
- Tavewa (Fi) 187-8
- Tavuni Hill Fort (Fi) 162
- taxes 831

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages

- te ano* 736-7
- telephone services 832, *see also individual countries*
- television 55-6
- Temae Lake (FP) 607
- Te'Nggano (Si) 567
- tennis 153
- Tepuka islet (Tu) 742
- Teraina Island (Ki) 258
- Terra Australis 41-2
- Tetepare (Si) 564
- theft 828
- Thio (NC) 325-6
- Thurston Gardens (Fi) 167
- Tia Seu Lupe (AS) 528
- tiare Maori* (Ci) 447
- Tikehau (FP) 647-8
- time 833, *see also individual countries*
- Tinian (NMI) 382-6, **383**
- Tipa 548
- tipping 831, *see also money in individual countries*
- Tiputa (FP) 644
- Tjibaou, Jean-Marie 298-9, 330, 339
- Tjibaou Cultural Centre (NC) 315, 9, 307
- To Sua Ocean Trench (Sa) 493-4
- To'aga site (AS) 535
- Toak (Va) 792
- Toatea Lookout (FP) 607
- toddy 259
- Tofol (FSM) 105
- Tofua (To) 711-12
- Togitogiga Recreation Reserve (Sa) 494
- Togo Chasm (Ni) 361
- Tokelau 679-86, **680**
 - accommodation 684-5
 - activities 685, *see also individual activity entries*
 - culture 681-3
 - drink 684
 - food 684
 - history 680-1
 - Internet resources 685
 - language 683
 - money 685
 - sports 682-3, *see also individual sports*
 - telephone services 685
 - time 685
 - travel to/from 685, 686
 - travel within 686
 - visas 686
- Tokelau telephones 684
- Tokoriki (Fi) 184
- Tomb Point (Ni) 360
- Tonga 687-731, **688**
 - accommodation 725
 - activities 698, 707-8, 715, 716-17, 725-6, *see also individual activity entries*
 - best eating 691
 - business hours 727
 - children, travel with 727
 - culture 690-1, 702
 - embassies & consulates 727
 - food 720
 - gay travellers 728
 - history 688
 - holidays 728
 - Internet access 728
 - Internet resources 728
 - itineraries 692
 - language 691
 - lesbian travellers 728
 - money 728
 - safety issues 727
 - shopping 702, 721
 - telephone services 728-9
 - time 729
 - tourist information 729
 - tours 698, 706, 718
 - travel to/from 729-30
 - travel within 731
 - visas 729
- Tongatapu (To) 692-707, **693**
- Tonoas Island (FSM) 123-4
- To'oga Toto (WF) 816
- Torres Islands (Va) 803
- Toula (To) 721
- tourist information 833, *see also individual countries*
- tours 840, 844, *see also individual countries*
- travellers cheques 831, *see also money in individual countries*
- Treasure Island (Fi) 181
- trekking, *see hiking*
- tribu de Bopope* (NC) 330
- tribu de Mouli* (NC) 340
- tribu de Petit Couli* (NC) 324
- Trou Bleu d'Anawa (NC) 339
- Trou Feuillet (NC) 324
- Tuamotu Islands (FP) 642-51, **643**
- Tuangonga Bay (Si) 567
- tuberculosis 850
- Tulagi (Si) 558
- Tumon Bay (Gu) 225, **226**

- tumunu* 463
 - tuna canneries (AS) 525
 - Tunuloa Peninsula (Fi) 199
 - Tupou dynasty 689
 - turtle & shark site (AS) 529
 - turtles 63, 506, 776, 778, 617
 - Tutuila (AS) 522-33, **523**
 - Tuvalu 732-50, **733**
 - accommodation 747
 - activities 747, *see also individual activity entries*
 - business hours 747
 - children, travel with 747
 - culture 735-8
 - embassies & consulates 747-8
 - Internet access 748
 - language 738
 - money 748
 - shopping 744
 - sports 736-7, *see also individual sports*
 - telephone services 748-9
 - time 749
 - tourist information 749
 - tours 742
 - travel to/from 749
 - travel within 745, 749-50
 - visas 749
 - Two Lovers Point (Gu) 225-6
 - typhoid fever 850
- U**
- 'Ua Huka (FP) 655-7
 - Uala (Si) 572
 - 'Ua Pou (FP) 657-8, **657**
 - 'Uiha (To) 711
 - Ulithi Atoll (FSM) 130
 - Uliveo (Va) 789
 - Uluisolo (Fi) 182
 - Ulupaka Cave (Ni) 361
 - Uluvehi Landing (Ni) 361
 - Umatat (Gu) 229
 - underworld gateway (Sa) 508
 - University of the South Pacific (Fi) 167
 - Uoleva (To) 711
 - 'Upolu (Sa) 485-503, **486-7**
 - urbanisation 143
 - Uri (Va) 787-8
 - Uripiv (Va) 787-8
 - US Territories 751-4, **752**
 - 'Utugake (To) 722
 - Uturoa (FP) 626, **627**
 - Utwe (FSM) 107
- V**
- vaccinations 846
 - Vaiaku (Tu) 739, **740**
 - Vaiare (FP) 607
 - Vaikona Chasm (Ni) 361
 - Vailala (WF) 816
 - Vaileka (Fi) 175-6
 - Vaipee (FP) 656
 - Vaitahu (FP) 661
 - Vaitupu (Tu) 745-6
 - Vaka'eitu (To) 722-3
 - Valesdir (Va) 778
 - Vangunu (Si) 566
 - Vanua Balavu (Fi) 209
 - Vanua Lava (Va) 803
 - Vanua Levu (Fi) 194-200, **196-7**
 - Vanuatu 755-809, **756**
 - accommodation 804-5
 - activities 770-1, 782, 805, *see also individual activity entries*
 - best eating 763
 - business hours 805
 - child-free accommodation 772
 - children, travel with 771, 805
 - culture 759-62, **615**
 - embassies & consulates 805
 - history 757-9
 - Internet access 806
 - Internet resources 806
 - itineraries 764
 - language 762-3
 - money 806-7
 - shopping 775
 - telephone services 807
 - time 807
 - tourist information 807
 - tours 771-2, 791, 796, 809
 - travel to/from 808
 - travel within 808-9
 - visas 807-8
 - Vao (NC) 342-4
 - Vatia (AS) 527
 - Vava'u Group (To) 712-23, **713**, **619**
 - vegetarian travellers 81
 - Vella Lavella (Si) 562
 - Vila Point (Si) 562
 - Viru Harbour (Si) 563
 - visas 833-4, *see also individual countries*
 - Viti Levu (Fi) 146-78, **148-9**
 - Viti Levu Highlands (Fi) 177-8
 - Voh (NC) 327
 - volcanoes 36
 - Solomon Islands 562, 566
 - Vanuatu 778, 781, 790-1

Vonavona Lagoon (Si) 563-4
voyaging 40-1

W

- Wairiki Catholic Mission (Fi) 203
- Waitavala Water Slide (Fi) 203
- Waitui Marina (Fi) 195
- Waiyevo (Fi) 202-4
- Wake Atoll (UST) 754
- walking, *see hiking*
- Wallis, Samuel 43, 581, 689, 811
- Wallis & Futuna 810-21
 - accommodation **819**
 - activities 816, 818, 819, *see also individual activity entries*
 - business hours 819
 - children, travel with 816, 819
 - culture 811-13
 - embassies & consulates 819
 - history 811
 - Internet access 820
 - Internet resources 820
 - itineraries 814
 - language 813
 - money 820
 - telephone services 820
 - time 820
 - travel to/from 820-1
 - travel within 821
 - visas 820
- Wallis Island (WF) 814-17, **815**
- Walung (FSM) 107
- Wan Smol Bag Theatre (Va) 771
- wantok* 546
- Wanyan (FSM) 130
- War Dog Memorial (Gu) 228
- War in the Pacific National Historical Park (Gu) 227
- Warrior's Leap (NC) 334
- Washington Island (Ki) 258
- waterfalls
 - Afareaitu waterfalls (FP) 607
 - Afu Au Falls (Sa) 508
 - Cascade de Bâ (NC) 330
 - Cascade de Ciu (NC) 326
 - Cascade de Tao (NC) 330, **307**
 - Cascade de Wadiana (NC) 322-3
 - Chutes de la Madeleine (NC) 322
 - Holupuru Falls (Si) 563
 - Imayo Waterfall (Va) 783
 - Kepirohi Waterfall (FSM) 113
 - Lehnpaipohn Waterfall (FSM) 113
 - Liduduhniap Waterfall (FSM) 113
 - Mataniko Falls (Si) 557
 - Mele-Maat Cascades (Va) 769

waterfalls *continued*
 Ngardmau waterfall (Pa) 409
 Ngatpang waterfall (Pa) 409
 Papapapai-tai Falls (Sa) 493
 Sopo'aga Falls (Sa) 494
 Talofofo Falls (Gu) 231
 Tarzan Falls (Gu) 230-1
 Tavoro Waterfalls (Fi) 206
 Vaipahi Waterfall (FP) 596
 Vaipo Waterfall (FP) 653, **10**
 Wigmore's Waterfall (CI) 442, 444
 Waya (Fi) 186-7
 Wayasewa (Fi) 186
 weather 28-9, 827
 Weathercoast (SI) 557
 weddings 824
 weights & measures, *see inside front cover*
 Weno (FSM) 121, **122**
 Western Islands (FSM) 124
 Western Province (SI) 558-67, **559**
 Western Samoa 479
 whale watching 826
 New Caledonia 349
 Tonga 698, 717, 718, 726, **11**
 whales 63, 310, 718
 whaling 37, 45, 63, 699
 White River (SI) 557
 windsurfing
 Guam 232
 Northern Mariana Islands 380

Wintua (Va) 789
 Woleai Atoll (FSM) 130
 women 52
 Women's Action for
 Change 142
 women's health 848
 work 834
 Wotje Atoll (MI) 284
 wrecks
 Guam 231
 Marshall Islands 279, 282
 Northern Mariana Islands
 375, 389
 Palau 406
 Pitcairn Island 428, **615**
 Solomon Islands 558
 Vanuatu 793
 WWII relics, *see also wrecks*
 Federated States of Micronesia
 105, 106, 123, 130
 Guam 227
 Kiribati 250
 Marshall Islands 283, **305**
 Nauru 293
 Palau 408, 411-12, 414
 Solomon Islands 557, 562-3
 Tuvalu 742
 Vanuatu 775, 793, 796

X

Xavier High School (FSM) 123

Y

yachting 825, *see also boating*
 Cook Islands 445
 Fiji 167, 186, **301**
 French Polynesia 627, 669
 New Caledonia 339, 348
 Tonga 715-16, 717-18,
 726
 within the South Pacific
 842-3
 Yakel (Va) 781
 Yakuveran (Va) 783
 Yanuca (Fi) 161, 166
 Yap (FSM) 126-34, **126, 127**
 Yapese etiquette 126
 Yasawa Group (Fi)
 184-9, **185**
 Yaté (NC) 322-3
 yaws 850
 Yeiwene, Yeiwene 339
 Yokoi Caves (Gu) 231
 youth culture 174
 Ypao Beach Park (Gu) 225

Z

Zeroes 129
 zoos
 Guam Zoological Botanical &
 Marine Garden (Gu) 225
 Parc Zoologique et Forestier
 (NC) 315

000 Map pages
000 Photograph pages