

The island hums to **its own tune**

For a tiny island, there's a lot going on in Rarotonga. The coastal road is only 32 kilometres long, and the drive around the island takes only a leisurely 50 minutes. By comparison, the road around Lake Taupo in the centre of the North Island is about 160 kilometres long.







After you've booked into your rooms and had a swim to cool off, spend a few hours touring around the island on the ring road. Another inland road which runs around most of the island is called the Are Matua, or back road.

Rather than hiring a car, it's much more fun to take one of the local buses, which run in both directions, or hire bicycles, scooters or small motorbikes.

The first thing you'll note is how clean and tidy the island is. There's very little litter, homeowners mow their lawn and take pride in their garden, the buildings are no taller than palm trees and you won't get hassled by hawkers.



RAROTONGA

Avarua, the main town, has plenty to keep everyone entertained. Stroll around the Punanga Nui Cultural Market and you'll soon relax into holiday mode. There will be island food, clothing, pareus to buy and wrap around you like a sarong, handcrafts and carving, and lots of food. You're bound to hear music as well, from people playing guitars or ukuleles, or stalls selling CDs of Cook Islands and Polynesian music.

Look for a delicious and healthy serving of marinated raw fish, called ika mata, and drink fresh coconut milk from a green coconut. Much better than candy floss and fries. If you want a meal in one of the legendary bars in the South Pacific, head across to Trader Jack's Bar and Grill.

Head to your right, or clockwise, as you set off around the island, and you'll pass the foreshore, where you can try and spot herons

and kuriri, and look at the boats bobbing in the bay. As you would expect, there's plenty of seafood on the menu, from fish and chips to smoked marlin salad, along with meat dishes and vegetarian.

The Cook Islands National Museum, which opened in 1992, is a great way to see how the locals are preserving their culture and heritage. There are old artifacts like 800-year-old pearl-shell fish hooks, and the importance of tivaivai, the artistic quilts which provide women with mana and prestige.

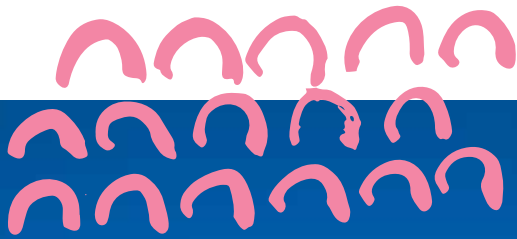
If you're craving some good Kiwi coffee, expat Neil Dearlove blends and roasts his gourmet beans at his home in Matavera. Look for an orange road cone to see if he's open, then stop for a fix of flat white or long black, and snack on a croissant.

Cook Island Maori also have marae as their gathering place, and the most important and sacred, Arai-Te-Tonga, is located just off the Ara Metua. The remnants of an outdoor royal courtyard, known as a koutu, ceremonial stones and other meeting grounds are still visible.

Muri Beach is the most bustling village on the island, with choices of cafés, restaurants, hotels and resorts, and rental companies, as well as the Muri Night Market. Held every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 5pm, it's a pleasant way for everyone to spend a few hours tasting local food from one of the stalls, enjoying some free entertainment and local dancing.

Muri Lagoon is renown as Rarotonga's most beautiful location, with wide, white sandy beaches and a range of watersports, including snorkelling, kayaking, paddleboarding and kite surfing. Small, uninhabited islands are accessible for a day visit.

Take one of the lagoon cruises to excellent snorkelling and swimming spots with brilliant coral and countless, colourful fish.



If you don't want to snorkel you can swim next to the boat or sit and watch the fish. The cruises may include a stop at a tiny mutu, or atoll island in the lagoon for a barbecue lunch, and there's plenty of time for the kids to explore or go in search of hermit crabs.

In the middle of the resorts and hotels of Muri Beach, about 15 minutes from Avarua, is Te Vara Nui Village, the cultural centre of the Cook Islands. The kids will enjoy the guided tour as it includes information and demonstrations of Cook Islands' culture, including weaving, coconut husking, woodcarving, cooking, medicine, fishing and costume making. They will be welcomed to try, and there's a big lunch and a cultural show to conclude the visit.

The combo package also includes the Over-Water Night Show in the evenings, where the entire family will enjoy the mesmerising drumming and dancing that Cook Islanders are renowned for.

Set in a rock garden, the performers provide an electric performance of the *Legend of Tongaiti*, their ancestor, who set sail from a faraway land, and how he first settled on Rarotonga. A generous buffet will ensure even the hungriest teenagers will be fully fed.

The southern coast also has Rarotonga's best beaches, with the best snorkelling to be found at Aro'a, Titikaveka and Tikioki. There is a snorkel rental shop at Titikaveka Beach. If your children are keen to try playing a ukulele, stop at Natua Ukelele at Aroa Beach. Natua will show you the timbers he uses, how to tune a ukulele, and maybe even play for you.

Titikaveka is especially good for children who may be wary of the ocean, as they can easily see schools of colourful fish while their feet are still on the sand.



Make sure you book a guide to look around the privately owned Takitumu Conservation Area, a community-based project. The guide will tell you how they are helping to save the very rare yellow kakerori, one of the world's rarest bird species, and help you spot them among the ferns, orchids, chestnuts and other native plants.

Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes, and bring sunscreen and lots of mosquito repellent.

About three kilometres past the Rarotongan Beach Resort you'll find a large, abandoned building site, beside which a road leads inland to Wigmore's Waterfall, oddly the only one on the island. It's okay to walk or ride a motorcycle or bicycle, but you'll need a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The road passes farmland but soon turns tropical, and you'll pass huge vines wrapped around tall trees before you view the lovely cascade and the swimming hole. Note that if it hasn't rained for a while the cascade is more like a stream, but it's still worthwhile.

Another option is to take the Aroa Pony Trek, situated just behind the Rarotongan Resort, and spend 2.5 hours on horseback to the waterfall and back along the beach.

If this sounds like a bit much for kids who aren't used to riding, you can arrange to have a half hour ride. The younger kids can share a horse with Mum or Dad. Another short stretch of road will see you back at Avarua.

You can also go inland, and for such a tiny island, Rarotonga has a rugged interior, with its highest point, Te Rua Manga, known as The Needle, providing a real challenge for any mountain climbers in the family.

Easily visible from many spots on the island, it offers unbeatable views from its base. Take plenty of water, sunscreen, and mosquito

repellent, and wear good outdoor footwear, as the track will be slippery if it's been raining. You may also hear the Rarotonga starling (i'oi), the Pacific pigeon (rupe) and the fruit dove (kukupu).

Pa's Mountain Walk is no longer with Pa, as he now concentrates on the less strenuous nature walk. The cross-island trek can also be a good family challenge, and you'll find yourself gripping vines and anything to hand as you ascend or descend some of the steeper sections. You'll learn about the herbal remedies and treatments that helps keep the locals healthy.

And for those fed up with walking, there's a four-wheel-drive Raro Mountain Safari Tour into the valleys and up to the mountain tops around the island for some stunning views.

PLACES TO STAY

Pacific Resort

When you've finished breakfast at the Pacific Resort, head for the Beach Hut and find out its daily schedule of activities. It has all the gear everyone will need for a day on the water, so you can try paddleboarding or take a kayak to snorkel in the lagoon. Otherwise, feel free to slump into a comfortable bean bag on the beach under an umbrella.

The Kids Club programme for children aged six to 12 has lots of things to keep the kids occupied. They may find traditional dancing is much harder than it looks, but the supervisors will soon have them playing the real wooden drums or making floral head eis.

Wriggle your toes in the sand at Sandals Restaurant while you're having lunch or dinner, and children have their own menu. The Pacific Resort has 64 studios, suites and villas, all decorated in modern Polynesian style.



FEED THE FISH!

There are so many cool things to see and do at The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Lagoonarium, like walking straight off the beach into the Aroa Lagoon Marine Reserve and feeding the fish by hand!

Because these fish live in a protected reserve they know they're safe so they don't dart away. Instead, they love making new friends.

The Rarotongan's Aroa Lagoon is a very special spot – it's right on the southwestern coast so receives all-day sun, it's able to be used at all-tides for free snorkelling, fish-feeding, kayaking, standup paddleboarding and swimming, and because it's been a ra'ui (reserve) for nearly 20 years, it offers Rarotonga's best snorkelling straight off The Rarotongan's Aroa Beach.

Aroa Lagoon has many colourful tropical fish with cool names like butterfly, squirrel, rabbit and angel. You can even go on The Rarotongan's Night Snorkelling Tour and see "the night shift" in action – like the parrot fish in its cool "jelly sleeping cocoon!"

For children aged to 11 years The Rarotongan offers a fun Cook Islands Nature & Culture Discovery Programme through their free Moko's Kids Club which is open year-round, Monday to Saturday, from 9am-12 noon, 2-5pm and the all-important 7-9pm...giving



parents space for quality time together in the evening. At The Rarotongan Kids Stay & Play free (to age 11), and even teen families are catered for, with Teens Stay free and the free Teen Zone for 12-16 years.

Families can choose standard Beachside or Beachfront Rooms which all come with microwaves and a fridge, two-bedroom interconnecting family suites, three-bedroom private pool villas or self-catering two-bedroom or grand beachfront suites.



MAKE NEW MEMORIES!



KIDS + TEENS STAY & PLAY FREE! at the Cook Islands' leading family friendly resort, **The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Lagoonarium**. Hand-feed the reef fish or enjoy all-tide, sheltered **FREE** snorkelling, stand-up paddleboarding or kayaking in the Aroa Lagoon Marine Sanctuary. Fun crab racing & karaoke! Kids Nature & Culture Discovery Programme @ **FREE** Moko's Kids Club. **NEW VIRTUAL TOURS** online.

Aroa Beach + Lagoon Marine Sanctuary | Rarotonga | COOK ISLANDS
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EDGEWATER RESORT AND SPA

The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Lagoonarium

Directly off the beach in front of The Rarotongan is the Aroa Lagoon Marine Sanctuary where the fish are tame enough to feed out of your hand. And the fun isn't restricted to daylight, as the resort also offers a Night Snorkelling Adventure.

Children aged up to 11 can play for free at Moko's Kids Club, and those under four years old won't miss out either, as long as they have a parent or caregiver with them. Complimentary cots and cribs, highchairs and baby baths are available on request at the time of booking. There is a crèche for children aged under four, and a Teen Zone with touch rugby on the beach and Disco Nites.

Everyone can enjoy the free daily activities, including scuba diving in the pool, drumming and dancing lessons, crab hunting and trivia nights. And keep the evening free for the Legends of Polynesia Island Night. Captain Andy's Beach Bar & Grill has a Gone Troppo menu for kids, and there are lots of daily specials.

Edgewater Resort and Spa

One activity children are unlikely to have done before is to go looking for crabs. They have one bright pink claw, live in holes on the side of the road, and can grow as large as dinner plates. However, the coconut crabs are endangered, so be careful with them. There is 600 metres of beach to stretch out on a towel or sit in a lounge. And it's the biggest resort in Rarotonga, with nine different room categories.

The friendly team at the Coconut Kids Club will keep children aged between four and 12 busy creating island-style costumes, tie-dyed fabric, postcards and learning basic Rarotongan greetings.

There's a Brasserie Restaurant, with live entertainment every night, and a Spaghetti House with pizzas and pasta.

The Spa is a great way for Mum and Dad to have some relaxation of their own, with creamy coconut lotions and body scrubs.



PACIFIC RESORT



PACIFIC RESORT



NAUTILUS RESORT

Nautilus Resort

Unlike most other resorts, the Nautilus Resort on Muri Beach has a Kids' Concierge coordinator, who can adapt various activities to suit children aged from five to 12 years old, depending upon numbers.

The children will spend the morning learning a little more about what it's like to live on Rarotonga by practising traditional skills and local crafts, finding out about the wonders of the coconut, or playing island music.

Meanwhile, their parents can enjoy the Polynesian Day Spa or sip a cool Nauti Mojito around the infinity pool.

The family can reunite for lunch and decide how they want to spend the afternoon, whether it's paddling a kayak or a stand-up paddleboard, or venturing beyond the resort and exploring Rarotonga's natural beauty, heritage and traditions.

When it comes to dining, the executive chef will dish up sea-fresh Pacific Rim fare, using produce grown in the resort's garden.



MOANA SANDS BEACHFRONT VILLAS



MURI BEACH RESORT



MURI BEACH RESORT

Muri Beach Resort

There's nothing better than a big family group going on holiday together. Rather than all having separate rooms, Muri Beach Resort has a Plantation House that sleeps up to eight people in three bedrooms, with a spacious, open-plan living and dining area and windows that open wide.

There are also apartments and villas, with all the villas including a spa bath so the family can jump into and relax as the sun goes down. Children aged three years and under can stay for free.

It's easy to keep everyone in a good mood here, as there are lots of beach activities, in-house movies for rainy days and evenings, and a Polynesian-style restaurant beside the pool.

Moana Sands Beachfront Villas

Families looking for a base for their Cook Islands holiday will find the two-bedroom Beachfront Villas and Beachside Apartments at the Cooks Moana Sands have everything they need. There is airconditioning, daily housekeeping and a fully equipped kitchen to make life easy. The nearby supermarket stocks everything families invariably require.

All the villas and apartments include a welcome breakfast basket to ensure a great start to your time here in this little paradise.

The Moana Sands overlooks the wide open Vaimaanga Beach, where the younger kids, and their parents, may like nothing better than building sandcastles, reading a book, or exploring the lagoon and all its sea life. The snorkelling gear, sun loungers and kayaks are free for guests to use. There is also a barbecue area and picnic tables for a lunch or dinner surrounded by palm trees and enjoyable balmy breezes.

Adults can relax at the Hibiscus Spa and enjoy some beauty therapy, including facials, massages, manicures and pedicures.



Rarotonga's most dreamed about beach villas!

3 x three bedroom quality, serviced villas
each sleeping up to six.
A genuine family beach retreat...

www.sandsvillasrarotonga.com

Sands Villas
RAROTONGA 



AITUTAKI

Head due north from Rarotonga for 45 minutes on a small plane and from out of the deep blue Pacific will appear the luminescent turquoise tones of Aitutaki atoll, a protective reef circling the atoll like a lariat, and with its tiny islands scattered inside like emeralds.

Aitutaki is a place for dreams and romance, so it's probably not the first choice for a holiday destination for most families. But if you have older teenagers who aren't into noise and don't mind being with their parents, it will cast a very strong spell.

It consists of a main island, and 15 smaller islands, called motu. The best known motu is probably One Foot Island, named because it looks like someone's left foot, but the legend is better.

The lagoon teems with pristine marine life, and water taxis will take you out to motus where you can snorkel, swim and relax for a few hours in complete isolation. The fishermen in the family will love trying to catch bone fish, a fighting fish which will make their reels spin.

The Orongo Centre is a busy marketplace on Saturday nights, but the biggest spectacles are the cultural performances presented by the locals, highlighted by the fire dancers.

There are numerous places to stay, from relaxed bungalows to a five-star resort, all specialising in warm, local hospitality.



Driving

The speed limit in Rarotonga is 50 kilometres per hour (40 if you're not wearing a helmet, but why wouldn't you?), and slow down to 30 in Avarua, Muri and the villages.

You will first need to call into the Police Department in Avarua and show your current licence and passport.

The Police will issue you with a Cook Islands licence as long as you are at least 16 years old. If you want to ride a scooter or motorbike, you will also need to pass a short practical test. Don't worry about it. They just want to know you can turn and stop.

Watch out for dogs, goats and chickens, and it's illegal to ride bicycles two-abreast.



NAUTILUS RESORT MURI BEACH RAROTONGA

A special place for a family holiday

Inviting families with children of all ages to enjoy a tropical island holiday at the 4.5 star Nautilus Resort, an absolute beachfront resort situated on the white sandy beaches of Muri Lagoon. The resort's Kids Concierge service, for 4-12 years, tailors daily activities to suit different ages and interests - it's free and it's fun. Focused on marine and culturally enhancing activities, kids can learn to weave a basket, paddle and snorkel in the shallow lagoon, and make new friends. Meanwhile Mum and Dad can visit Spa Nautilus while the kids are being taken care of.

A full breakfast is included daily, with fresh, seasonal healthy offerings on a tropical buffet and hot plated options. For dinner there is a great kid's menu in the resort's award winning beachfront restaurant or choose the in-room dining service.

Relax in one, two and three bedroom Polynesian inspired Ares (villas) – garden or beachfront. Each Ares has its own salt water plunge pool, a large deck to relax, a handy kitchenette in one bedroom Ares suitable for making light snacks, or in the larger two and three bedrooms Ares enjoy the full kitchen and dine together. All Ares offer Wi-Fi, complimentary movies and music system.

Set the air-conditioning temperature at night and the kids will sleep comfortably, while mums and dads can relax on their private balcony and enjoy balmy tropical evenings.

res@nautilusresortrarotonga.com
nautilusresortrarotonga.com



FAST FACTS

Absolute beachfront • Complimentary water sports
All with private plunge pools • Kid's concierge & Tourdesk
Thalgo Spa

MURI BEACH RESORT MURI BEACH RAROTONGA

Cool family fun right beside the beach

This 3.5 star family-friendly resort, set in tropical gardens, offers affordable beachfront luxury on Rarotonga's spectacular Muri Beach overlooking the crystalline Muri Lagoon. The resort's large centrally situated pool offers a beautiful setting for Aqua Cafe, the resort's onsite Polynesian inspired al fresco dining outlet and cocktail bar. The 20 stylishly-appointed, recently renovated self-contained villas and apartments, consist of some two bedroom options, ideal for extended families who love to live, cook and eat their own style. Other villas offer beachfront living, lagoon views or others are re-set in tropical gardens. All of which offer kitchenettes inclusive of microwave, refrigerator, cooktop, with queen-size beds, and the luxury of Jacuzzi spa baths and air conditioning. TV, an i-Pod dock plus in-house movies and Wi-Fi. On tap drinking water is UV treated and filtered. Aqua Cafe & Cocktail Bar's menu features fresh, light selection of meals perfect to share whilst enjoying Happy Hour cocktails or dine with the family. And there's lots of kid friendly options such as pizza!

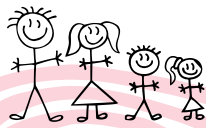
Lagoon action includes stand-up paddle boarding, kayaks, and snorkelling from the resort, plus bicycle hire, great walking trails, ocean fishing, and superb safe South Pacific swimming, can be arranged by the resort staff. Childminding is available. Muri Beach Resort – affordable tropical luxury for family relaxation.

relax@muribeachresort.com
muribeachresort.com



FAST FACTS

Absolute beachfront • Safe Lagoon swimming
12 metre swimming pool • Polynesian inspired restaurant and bar
Complimentary watersports • Tourdesk



FAMILY FAVOURITES



Mike and the girls

Good vibes.

Juggling family life and work commitments makes for a busy life for television writer Kate Hall and her musician husband, Mike. In between scripts and touring, the Auckland couple still manage to get away for a family break and this time the destination was the chilled out island of Rarotonga on the Cook Islands.

Why did you choose this destination for your family holiday?

We went to Rarotonga as a couple in early December and enjoyed the island's pre-Christmas vibe, the white sand beaches with clear blue water, the night markets and plenty of other local activities. We found ourselves saying: the kids would love this! We decided to bring them with us the next time we came back, and basically booked a family trip the day after we got home.

How many times has your family been there?

Just the once so far, but we have booked another trip and are really looking forward to it.

Which property did you stay at?

Pacific Resort Rarotonga.

What was your reason for choosing the resort?

Having been to the Pacific Resort before, we loved the friendliness and hospitality of the staff, who made us feel welcome and who remembered us from the last time we had been there. Being right on Muri Lagoon is amazing, walk out your door and it's all there for you. The rooms were nice and spacious, so we never felt squeezed in.

How old are your children?

Three girls 14, 12 and two. Plus we brought our 11-year-old nephew, too.

What did the kids love most about Rarotonga?

They loved the relaxed, non-resort feel, seeing crabs run across the sand and walking to the night markets. They loved how the staff treated them like old friends, let them in on little secrets like the eel who lived under the deck, and how the staff hugged them when they were leaving, seeming genuinely disappointed to see them go.

What did you love most about the island?

We love the pristine, almost deserted beaches that can be found driving round the island in the rental car, the crystal clear water and white sand; the cool little beachside restaurants to be discovered; the tropical vibe where everything can be washed clean with a dramatic downpour in the morning and then dried out for the rest of the day with brilliant sun and blue skies.



What were your top family activities?

A trip to Vili Burgers. Reputedly the best burgers in Rarotonga. Punanga Nui Markets on a Saturday morning. Night markets in Muri for awesome food.

What are your top tips for taking a family away here?

Hire a car so that you can explore. It's just 40 minutes or so to drive around the whole island - and stop off at beautiful Instagram-worthy beaches for swimming and snorkelling.

YOUR PIECE OF PARADISE

For family relaxation in a tropical paradise look no further than Moana Sands Group. With two family friendly locations, the little (and big!) kids will be frolicking in the water or building sandcastles in the sun in no time. Perfectly situated on the Southern coast of Rarotonga, Moana Sands Beachfront Hotel and Villas will be your pacific home away from home

COOK ISLANDS
www.moanasands.co.ck



PACIFIC RESORT RAROTONGA

Laid back fun in the Sun! With a complimentary kids club and a wide range of water activity equipment, families often make use of the snorkelling equipment exploring the underwater sea life or venture out on a family kayak adventure together. With plenty of activities for children of all ages, and relaxing options for adults, there is something for everyone to enjoy at the award winning family friendly Pacific Resort Rarotonga.



*Pacific
Resort*
Rarotonga

AUTHENTIC BOUTIQUE

pacificresort.com



SPOTLIGHT KIDS CLUB

Edgewater Resort and Spa

Kids can play at their own pace.

Kiddies will find it really easy to make friends at the Edgewater Resort and Spa. The Coconut Kids' Club is just the spot for having fun with other children, or engaging with one of the delightful supervisors, who will treat the children as though they've known each other for ages.

They'll teach them basic Rarotongan greetings, lots of energetic dance moves, and traditional Rarotongan rhythms so they can dance to the beat on a real log drum.

In keeping with Rarotonga's culture, the kids will love wearing a loose, comfy pareu, or sarong, and learning how to tie it properly. And with lots of bright little flowers around, the girls especially will have lots of fun making colourful garlands and posies, and they'll smell nice, too. They'll also love going out in the evenings, just as the sun goes down, to pick the flowers of the Cook Islands, the star-like tiare maori.

The Coconut Kids' Club is designed for children aged from four to 12, but younger ones can also join in, as long as Mum or Dad are also with them. Otherwise, the folks can relax, knowing they're having a great time. The club is located between the pool and the Garden Superior Rooms, and is open for three sessions a day, with breaks for lunch and tea.

The kids will be as happy as Larry painting each other's faces, learning how to tie-dye fabric into swirly patterns, and decorating coconuts. Don't worry about the paint getting everywhere. Most of it will come off after a swim in the sea and a good wash.

Rarotongan crabs are much bigger than anything the kids are likely to have seen. Known as coconut crabs, they are as large as dinner plates, and they have one claw coloured bright pink so they can break through a tough coconut shell. The crabs live in holes on the side of the road, and the kids will have fun searching for them and carefully examining them.

