

A charming **outdoor wonderland**

Niue, a coral atoll three hours flight time from New Zealand, is a perfect playground for parents with teenage travellers, with chasms to explore, turquoise rock pools to snorkel, bike rides and fishing on offer. To get everyone's adrenalin pumping there are giant coconut crabs (uga), heaving blowholes and here's the real kicker - from April to September whales come to Niue's warm waters to nurse their calves. Niue is the place to go to experience the genuine beauty of a Pacific Island, away from the usual tourist spots.

New Zealand-born painter Mark Cross, who has lived in the affectionately named "Rock" for 40 years, has described it as "a microcosm of the whole world" and it's immediately clear why. The island is nearly four times the size of Rarotonga, but has about 1500 residents (Rarotonga has more than 10,000).

There's fewer than a dozen restaurants/café's to choose from, very few shops, just one resort and a handful of boutique accommodation options. It has everything a family will need for their holiday, without detracting from the simplicity of the island, and this stripped-back ease provides an ideal canvas for relaxation and adventure, where children will understand the gift of a true Pacific experience.

Most of Niue's 14 villages are dotted around the island on a coastal loop road, with beautiful forest at its centre. Most of the must-see spots are easy to find from the road, so it's a good idea for everyone to sit down together each evening with a pen and a map and decide where your next day's adventures are going to be.

Being an atoll, swimming and snorkelling may depend on the tides, and it just feels right to have to work each day around Mother Nature's plans.



AVAIKI CAVE



MATAPA CHASM

ISLAND HIGHLIGHTS

Hikutavake

On the northwestern side of the island is Hikutavake Reef, where there are three deep pools at low tide. Allow a few hours to explore this special place – there’s weird and wonderful fish galore and exciting swim-throughs. Plan to be there in the late afternoon so you can stay on and admire the sunset from the lookout at the top of the walkway. As is typical of many spots on Niue, the reef may well be deserted, except perhaps for a snorkeller or two, or a local fisherman with a hand-made fishing rod.

Limu Pools

A few minutes’ drive from Hikutavake is Limu Pools, home to a deep swimming hole, sheltered from the sea by a rock and great for kids. It’s a beautiful spot for snorkelling in any tide, is easily accessible and is a perfect spot for a picnic.

Matapa Chasm

A lovely, cool bush trail leads to a channel of water between two sheer cliff faces. This swimming, snorkelling and cliff-jumping haven is legendary for being the bathing place of Niue’s kings.

Avaiki Cave

Avaiki Cave should be near the top of any list of favourite things to do on Niue. The various water colours and rock formations are spectacular. Swim in the clear waters of the cave and watch the waves break onto the shore. Bring reef shoes at low tide and walk around to the next cave for some crab hunting.

Keep an eye out for whales swimming in the distance, and if the time is right, bathe in the pool while watching the sunset. Magic!

Togo Chasm

On the eastern coast of the island is Togo Chasm, about a 45-minute walk from the main road and another highlight of any island visit. The walk starts through forest and emerges into a track winding through jagged rock pinnacles, with a view of wild waves crashing into the coast.

The track reaches a steep ladder that leads to a pretty little oasis of sand surrounded by coconut trees. A deep cave is easily accessible at low tide. Wear good shoes for this walk as it’s not for the fainthearted, but it’s well worth the effort.

Swim at Utuko Beach

Contrary to belief, there are beaches on Niue, and Utuko in Alofi is a fine example of one! The check-in at Niue airport opens early, so check in, drop off your bags and head here for a final swim and a bite to eat in the town centre.

Visit Trevor

Near the supermarket and bowling club is a small pool the local firefighters keep topped up, for a valued local resident lives there.

Trevor, the only mallard duck on Niue, arrived when he was blown off course during a storm. Trevor has become a popular attraction and is known all around the world after his unique arrival and reception caught the attention of social media and international news channels.

Swim with dolphins and whales

Niue has two whale-watching enterprises, Magical Niue Adventures and Buccaneer Niue Adventures Dive. Jump on board one of their boats and your family will enjoy the company of their entertaining and informative crew. There’s no guarantee the



mother whales will show up, or want to swim with people, so the trip is filled with anticipation.

You may be lucky enough to see a mother and baby calf turn up in the right mood to let people in the water with them. There's little that compares to swimming with such magnificent giants, and watching them ascend from the ocean depths to the surface in all their enormous glory.

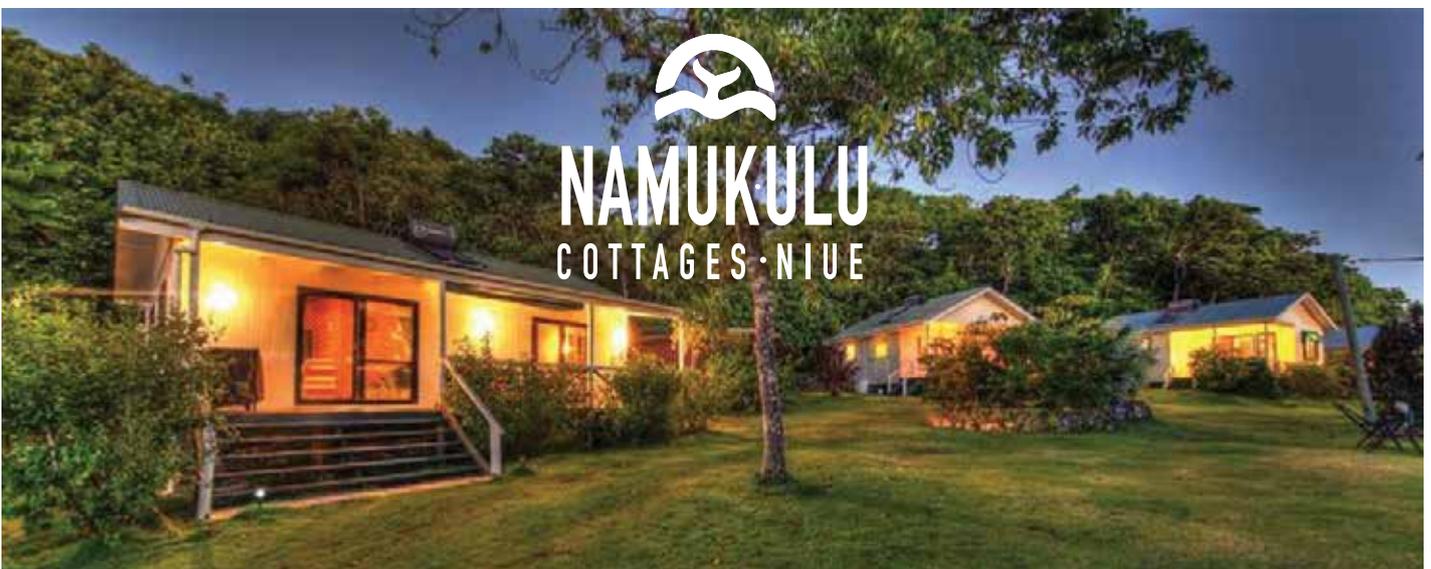
And if dolphins are around there may also be the option of swimming with these playful creatures. The trip itself offers a new perspective on Niue from the sea, and you may see flying fish, stingrays, turtles or reef sharks, and snorkel over a stunning live coral reef. And - spoiler alert - there may also be a surprise snorkel into a deep cave, aptly called "The whale's belly."

Do a tour

There is a range of tours available on Niue and they are a wonderful way to get to know the history and culture, and get a taste of the spots to go back and visit.

Guides such as Vanessa Marsh are very knowledgeable and provide an articulate, engaging tour. They are happy to go out of their way to provide local hospitality, such as detouring to their own home for extra towels.

You'll struggle to visit Mark Cross' art gallery and not leave without buying a piece of work. His portraits are beautiful (and feature his wife and other locals), and his landscapes capture the unique beauty of the island he has called home for four decades.



Namukulu Cottages offer six spacious, deluxe self-contained cottages/studios, all featuring private decks with BBQs. A beautiful, secluded location within minutes of five of Niue's most spectacular snorkelling sites. Enjoy panoramic views of the sea, explore the pristine reef or cycle through lush forests right from your Namukulu doorstep.

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PLACES TO STAY

Namakulu Cottages

Owned and run by Ross Hight and Michelle Andrew, Namakulu Cottages comprise six fully self-contained units in a beautiful tropical garden setting on the northwestern side of the island, near some of the best snorkelling spots.

The Kiwi couple relocated to Niue a year ago after Michelle, who ran horse treks in Martinborough, east of Wellington. They visited Niue, fell in love with the island, and returned with Michelle's three children, Harry, George and Abby, and their affectionate, well-behaved dogs Snip and Ruby (a springer spaniel and a chocolate Labrador).

These comfortable, spacious cottages are a great place for families. With stove tops and Weber barbecues, families have the option to eat at home, and there is a new supermarket near the airport.

The grounds are spacious, and make sure you're there to see the sunsets from the lookout. Michelle and Ross are planning to make even more of the spectacular view with plans to build a pizza oven and bar, an outdoor cinema and a souvenir shop.

The accommodation is self-service, but Michelle and Ross are a great help. Ross, who was a police officer in Palmerston North for 18 years, bakes delicious bread, there's snorkelling gear and they are happy to give advice on what to do and where to eat. On Saturdays, the family run a brilliant barbecue and quiz night by the pool. It's a fun way to meet your neighbours while sharing an excellent meal. They also run a cycling tour to the Washaway Café (see where to eat) on a Sunday, which is another great way to see the island.

They also like to rescue uga, which can grow to the same size as small cats, from becoming people's dinner. It's easy to see how these crustacean's giant claws strip flesh from coconuts!

Scenic Matavai Resort

The Scenic Matavai Resort on the southwestern coastline is another great option for families, either in the main resort, or the self-contained apartments located just over a kilometre away. The Matavai's spacious deck is the perfect spot for watching whales, and the kids will make the most of the pools while their parents enjoy a drink.



DELIGHTFUL DINING

Some fascinating characters call Niue home, and the size of the island means you'll have the opportunity to meet many of them. Israeli-born Avi Rubin runs Kaiika restaurant in the main centre, Alofi. Avi was running a commercial fishing business in Niue when he met Japanese Niue enthusiast Taiichi Fox, who expressed his desire to eat Japanese food when he visited.

The combination of Avi's access to fresh fish and Taiichi's influences from Japanese chefs created a local winner. Be sure to check out Avi's Ark on the back of the property. He was given the boat as payment by a debtor and it's now the home of his weekly wine club.

Make sure you all have dinner at Falala'fa Café, also in Alofi. The sashimi is delicious and the tuna with pilaf rice is a total treat. Also worth a visit is Vaiolama Café in Alofi, owned by a former Mayor of Wellington, Mark Blumsky, and his wife Pauline Rex. The restaurant has a stunning ocean view and is open for lunch every day, except Saturday, and for dinner on Thursday. The rock melon crush is an island favourite.

Mark, who was posted to Niue as High Commissioner in 2010, fell in love with the island and his wife-to-be Pauline, and made it home. As well as the restaurant, Mark set up a hydroponics company, Niue Fresh, with James Douglas, which he set up to satisfy his craving for fresh lettuce, which was rare in Niue.



Leave time on a Sunday to visit Washaway Café on Avatele Bay, one of the few cafés open on the day of worship and rest. Run by Willie Saniteli, the cash-only restaurant is operated on a charming honesty system, with customers writing their order in a book and helping themselves to drinks from the bar. The café keeps it simple with yummy focaccias, burgers, pizzas and fries, and it's a charming example of the relaxed, social and honest nature of Niue.



Getting around

It's well worth hiring a car in Niue and heading off to explore. Let your children decide where to go. They'll sniff out the best spots! Niue offers the rare opportunity to find your own piece of paradise and have it all to yourselves. Drivers won't be able to go fast because of what locals like to call the "speed holes". Apparently there is reluctance to fix the potholes because they reduce the number of vehicle accidents. In any case, they have the added bonus of making you slow down, smell the sea air and admire the natural beauty and the pretty villages.





FAMILY FAVOURITES

This is the life.

Jodie Hunter and her family are huge fans of Niue. They've been there four times. And if their love of the island is anything to go by, they'll be back another four times and counting!

Why did you choose Niue for your family holiday?

It's just so relaxed, the people are warm and welcoming, nothing is a rush, it's beautiful and you're never shoulder-to-shoulder with other tourists.

How many times has your family been there?

We have been to Niue four times.

Which property/properties did you stay at?

Taloa Heights and some rental houses!

What was reason for choosing the accommodation?

We prefer to stay in places where we can make our own breakfast and lunch and then eat out for dinner. Because Taloa Heights has self-contained chalets we can do just that. It also has a central location, plus there's a great swimming pool for the kids.

How old are your children?

Two girls, four and seven years old.

What do the kids love most about the island?

Exploring! They love finding new rock pools which they can snorkel in and see all the amazing sea life. Even the walk down to the sea is great fun trying to spot lizards, crabs and dragonflies. They also enjoy going back to our familiar spots such as Matapa Chasm and Limu Pools. They have a lot of fun jumping from the rocks at the pools!

What did you love most about the island?

The snorkelling is amazing and because the rock pools and swimming areas are sheltered from the open sea, it means the girls can freely snorkel with their swimming vests on. It is an untouched beauty and often you can find yourselves completely alone at the different beaches and swimming spots. Niuean people are very friendly and welcoming, and on return visits you are treated like family!

What were your top family activities?

1. Snorkelling in the rock pools at low tide.
2. Exploring the different caves and chasms around the island.
3. Whale watching either from the shore or on a boat excursion during the whale season (July–September).



Jodie Hunter and the girls



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

Be prepared to slow down and spend most of your days exploring the natural environment. Plan on getting a rental car to make it easier to get around the island. It is also safer to leave the car keys in the car rather than taking them with you. Because of the rocky terrain it is easy for the keys to slip out and fall and it is completely safe to leave them in the car!