

Cook Islands IDYLL

BY EWEN BELL

*A picture tells a thousand words,
particularly when in a tropical
wonderland like the Cook Islands.*







Opening image: The Pacific Resort on Aitutaki is a great place to get in the water, or just watch it from the beach.

Clockwise from above: The Blue Lagoon of Aitutaki is over 50 square kilometres of teal and blue, rimmed by reef and the occasional beach; Catch of the day – a local fisherman sells his bounty by the roadside; Nuts from the Tamanu tree are used for treating joint pain on the islands.

The Cook Islands is a disparate collection of tiny rocks that poke above the waves, mostly fringed by reef instead of sand. Barely. Cook Islanders are a semi-organised kind of folk with lots of Polynesian charm and just the right amount of hospitality to make sure visitors can enjoy a comfortable stay.

NZ Dollars are the local currency so you can easily figure out what things cost without the need of a calculator. Flights to the main island of Rarotonga are very cheap, with some flights direct from Sydney but most of the traffic going via Auckland.

Rarotonga is the main island, and it's very, very small. A single road does a loop around the coast and you can drive it in about an hour, maybe less if you don't have to stop for chickens crossing the road. There are some very fancy resorts tucked away but also lots of cheap bungalows if you want to self-cater or hang out with the entire family.

The stunning atoll of Aitutaki is a remarkable blue lagoon protected by reef and just 50 minutes flying time from Rarotonga. The shades of teal, aqua and jade within the lagoon, and the wildlife that live amongst it, is something you will remember your entire life. There are some impressive resorts on Aitutaki, sufficiently luxurious to complement the natural beauty of the atoll. •







Top: Captain Moko is the man you want when it's time to go chasing the Mahi Mahi.

Above: Coconut Crab is one of the rarest items on the menu in Aitutaki, a unique species that climbs coconut trees to snip off the green nuts.

Right: The locals on Aitutaki know that Tupuna's is the best place in the islands for chilli crab.



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Top left: Every Saturday morning the Punanga Nui Market brings Rarotonga to life, filled with local crafts, fresh produce and sizzling cooked treats for breakfast or lunch.

Top: White Terns inhabit the smallest of islands on the edge of Aitutaki but are very tolerant of day trippers.

Above: Coconuts form the basis of cuisine on the Cook Islands, and beauty treatments too.

Left: Small scale farming leaves plenty of room for free-range pigs amongst the fruit trees and coconut palms.

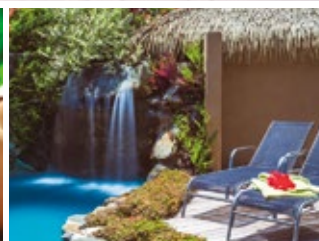


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From left: There is one single road that rings around Rarotonga so it's very hard to get lost; Preparing the umu (earth oven feast) with banana leaves to dampen down the hot coals; Hermit crabs outnumber the chickens on Rarotonga and are much easier to catch.

Photography by Ewen Bell.

Ewen works with a Canon 5DMkIII and shoots most of his work with his two favourite prime lenses, the Canon 50mm f/1.2 and Canon 24mm f/1.4. Ewen shares his time between travel assignments and writing advice on travel photography. His website "Photography for Travellers" is rich in inspiration and information, to help you change the way you see photography.



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