

# Our South

A sprinkling of island gems on an indigo blue ocean... The Cook Islands combined make up a land area of just 240 square kilometers. They are scattered far and wide in the vast expanse of the South Pacific Ocean, covering a total area of 2.25 million square kilometers. Each of these 'gems' is unlike any other; all having their own special characteristics and every one offering a warm welcome to visitors.

## The Southern Group

### Atiu

See our story on page 74.

### Mangaia

Imagine visiting a fairly large island where you, and maybe a handful of others, are the only tourists. Mangaia is an island of incredible, serene beauty – from its' rugged coastline to the lush, green interior. It is peaceful beyond belief for those accustomed to the constant rush and haste of the outside world. This is a place where one can trek for miles along the coast, or in the interior and not meet another soul, or hear a vehicle. Nor see any dwellings, just lots of well-tended plantations of pineapples, vegetables, taro, kumara and other crops.

Deep sea fishing excursions are available – just ask your host Ura, who manages Babe's Place. She can also steer you in the right direction for guided tours that include caving, reef/lagoon walks and bush walks. Check out the market on Friday mornings in the 'town' centre and the craftwork by the skilled Mangaian women. The shell necklaces and woven

pandanus bags are labour intensive and sold for very reasonable prices. Mangaia is the destination for those who love the outdoors, appreciate peace and quiet and want to experience a friendly island that's not in the least "touristy."

### Mauke

The garden island of the Cook group, Mauke is 18 kilometres around. It is surrounded by makatea (fossilised coral) with a volcanic plateau in the centre.

Parts of the foreshore are dotted with isolated white sandy coves and caves that one can swim in. Inland there are fresh water swimming caves including Vaitango and Motuanga Cave that has galleries reaching beneath the reef. The reef

is so close to the foreshore that crashing white breakers are visible from most of the unsealed coral road that runs around the island. Mauke is also only one of 5 areas around the world where the Hawksbill turtles come to nest. Do visit the "divided church" built where the villages of Ngatiarua and Arcora meet.

Shared by the two villages, it has two separate entrances



*Mauke Island, Dylan Harrison  
Photography © Cook Islands Tourism*

# Pacific Home

*Divine Retreat photo courtesy  
of the owners of Cook Islands Tourism*

and sitting areas. There are clean and comfortable places to stay in Mauke - try Ri's Retreat or Tiare Holiday Cottages. Ri's Hideaway is on the south coast of the island. They can also organise cave, reef and forest tours. Be sure to obtain a garland of the fragrant maire, a creeper that grows along the makatea. It is gathered by the women and exported to Hawaii. Mauke is picturesque, unhurried and tranquil – a wonderful tonic for frayed nerves!

## Mitiaro

Of the cluster of islands in the southern group called Nga Pu Toru, Mitiaro would be the least visited by tourists. Not because it is any less beautiful than sister islands Atiu and Mauke, but simply that it is the least known.

Divine Retreat provides accommodation in Mitiaro – a spacious and modern 3 bedroom home + 2 new 1 bedroom villas that have just been completed. The property is owned by Cindy & Junior Abraham.

In the centre of Mitiaro are two lakes full of itiki, freshwater eels. Mitiaro itiki are considered a delicacy in the Cook Islands. Tilapia (bream) are also abundant in the lakes. The lakes are from time to time protected by a traditional raii, a prohibition on all fishing to preserve stocks. At its widest point, the island is 6.4km across and private gardens in the village are beautifully kept and neat. Community activities include fishing, sports, handicrafts and uapou, or village singsongs.

Also well-known for their fresh water swimming cave pools – Vai Nauri and Vai Tamaroa. Vai Marere is a sulphuric water cave said to have healing properties on skin irritations. Mitiaro is also the native home to Pritchardia Mitiaroana – a variety of Fan Palm.

Pretty and unspoiled, life on Mitiaro is refreshingly uncomplicated.



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Locally owned and operated, Island Hopper Vacations have been delivering innovative and unique Cook Islands experiences to the world for 30+ years.



We offer an extensive collection of holiday packages for Rarotonga and our outer islands including an 8-day adventure to discover the natural beauty of Mangaia, Mauke, Mitiaro and Atiu, or by private jet fly to our remote and unspoiled Northern Group islands on a 5-day exploration tour of Manihiki, Pukapuka, and Tongareva.



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### **Takutea**

Just a few miles off the coast of Atiu lies the uninhabited island of Takutea. Numerous sea-birds thrive on this pristine island that has been declared a bird sanctuary by the Atiu Island Council. Only they can give permission for visitors to land there.

### **Palmerston**

Made famous by Englishman William Marsters, who settled there in 1863 with three wives. He later married and raised a large family. Marsters' modern day descendents are scattered all over the world. About 60 still remain in Palmerston, which has six motu or islets in a big blue lagoon about 11km across. The family exports fish, supplying in particular, parrot fish to Rarotonga restaurants. Palmerston hosts the occasional cruise ship and yachts frequently call in.

The island also boasts one of the world's most isolated bars, where thirsty yachties can enjoy a "cold one" and hear tales being regaled by the islanders. It is 500km north west of Rarotonga.

### **Manuae**

Manuae is an uninhabited nature reserve and an important seabird and turtle breeding ground. Its two islets in a large shallow lagoon make-up this incredibly beautiful island, situated about 100km south east of Aitutaki. Many Aitutakians can claim traditional land rights to parts of Manuae.

Once inhabited by work gangs of Cook Islands men who produced copra, it is now only occasionally visited by Aitutaki fisherman for its rich fishing grounds outside and within the lagoon. It is possible to view Manuae from the air, on a flight from Atiu to Aitutaki.

## The Northern Group

### **Suvarrow**

Suvarrow is one of the few "untouched" sanctuaries left in the world where existing endangered species can survive. The Suvarrow National Park is the first National Park in the Cook Islands - international environmental groups recognise the group of tiny atolls as an untouched haven and breeding area for turtles, sea birds and crabs. Because of the lack of

human intervention, Suvarrow is acknowledged as one of the most important sea bird breeding areas in the Pacific. A caretaker and his family live on Suvarrow during the cyclone off-season, between April and November each year. Yachts often visit the island during these months.

Suvarrow was made famous by New Zealand hermit Tom Neale, who lived there during the early 1950's and again in the early 1960's. He wrote about his experiences in his book "An Island to Oneself."

### **Pukapuka**

Lying northwest 1150 km from Rarotonga, Pukapuka is one of the most isolated islands of the Cook group. One inter-island flight from Rarotonga about every six weeks and irregular shipping has kept Pukapuka one of the most untouched and secluded places in the Pacific. Its remoteness has also kept the traditions and culture of Pukapuka largely unchanged for centuries.

Islanders speak the distinct Pukapukan language as well as Cook Islands Maori. According to legend, almost 500 years ago the Pukapuka population was almost entirely wiped out during a catastrophic storm that struck the island.

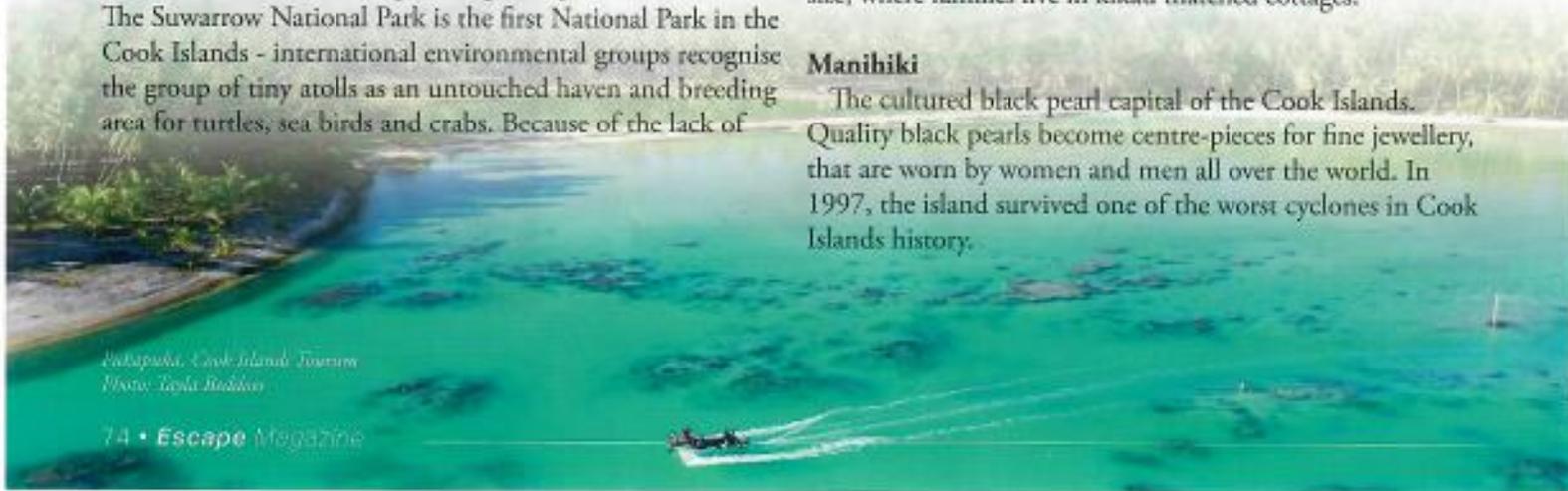
Fourteen people survived, from whom Pukapukan's today are said to descend. The late American writer Robert Dean Frisbie settled there in 1924 and immortalised Pukapuka in the books he wrote about life on the island. The now uninhabited area where he lived with his Pukapuka wife and children is one of the most beautiful - an untouched white sandy beach with palm trees reaching out to tease the clear blue lagoon.

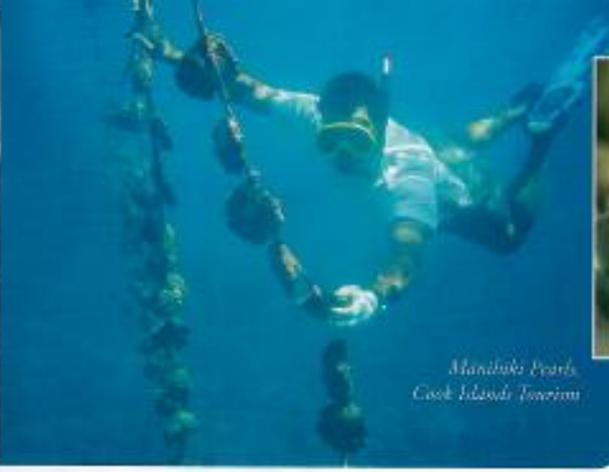
### **Nassau**

Access to this tiny island of about 80 Pukapukans can only be gained by inter-island boat. Regarded as the sister island of Pukapuka, a voyage from Rarotonga takes about three days. The islanders are adept at surviving an isolated lifestyle that remains unchanged year after year. Nassau was hooked up to the country's telephone system only in 2001 and many of the people had never used a telephone before. It is just 1.2km<sup>2</sup> in size, where families live in kikau thatched cottages.

### **Manihiki**

The cultured black pearl capital of the Cook Islands. Quality black pearls become centre-pieces for fine jewellery, that are worn by women and men all over the world. In 1997, the island survived one of the worst cyclones in Cook Islands history.





Manihiki Pearls  
Cook Islands Tourism



It claimed 20 lives after a tidal wave swept men, women and children out into the huge, raging lagoon. Pearl farms dot this remarkable lagoon. Villagers use small outboard motor boats to travel between Tukao and Tauhunu – two villages on separate islets – or to their pearl farms set up on coral outcrops. Some of the pearl farms are sophisticated operations jutting out of the deep blue lagoon, complete with small gardens and poultry farms that help support workers who live in modern quarters.

Manihiki women have made history for entering what was once a male dominated vocation. A number of women own and manage their own pearl farms, diving, seeding and cleaning the oyster shells all year round. The women are also renowned for their finely woven craftwork. Manihiki is astonishingly beautiful and those who have been fortunate enough to visit the island, have never been disappointed.

### Rakahanga

Sister island of Manihiki and 42km north-west. Visits to Rakahanga are only possible by boat from Manihiki or inter-island vessel. There are two main islands and seven islets in the Rakahanga lagoon. The island is picturesque and unspoiled.

### Penrhyn

Penrhyn (or Tongareva) is the most remote of the Cook group, lying 1365 km NNE of Rarotonga. It has a remarkable blue water lagoon measuring 233km<sup>2</sup>. A 77km coral reef encircles the islets in the extraordinary lagoon. The villages of Tetautua and Omoka are on different islets that are barely visible to each other. Penrhyn island women make the finest rito craftwork in the Cook Islands. Hats, bags, fans and mats made in Penrhyn are amongst the best to be found anywhere in the world.



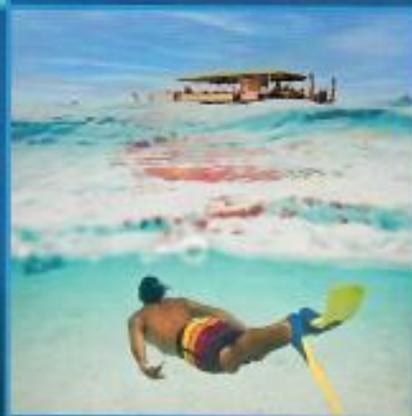
# One Unforgettable Day

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question. Amazing fresh  
local food. Phenomenal  
authentic entertainment."*

*"Truly  
amazing  
excursion...  
I recommend  
it to anyone."*



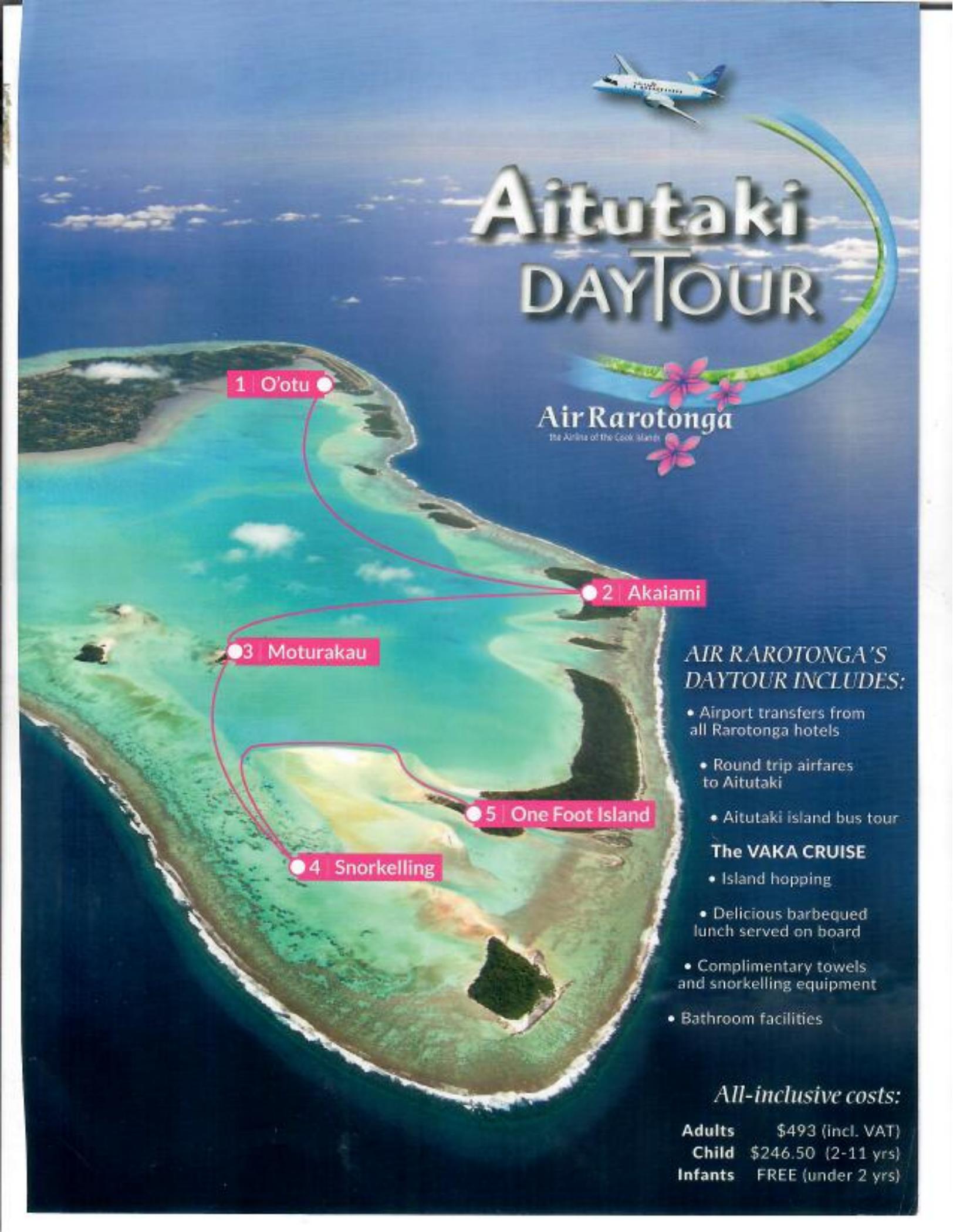
*"One of the best days of  
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# Escape

Magazine of the  
Cook Islands



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