

Pacific Islands

Adventures like no place on earth

Rarotonga

Hiking the Cross-Island Track

Ten minutes into my ascent of Rarotonga's 413m-high 'Needle', a dip into the warm waters of the island's halo-like lagoon is effortlessly topping my 'must do' list. But first I need to negotiate the steep and slippery tangle of roots and mini-ravines making up the first half of Rarotonga's Cross-Island Track.

Close behind me is local hiking legend Pa, carrying plenty of fresh papaya and bananas for on-the-go sustenance. Pa is a well-worn nickname, apparently borne out of the frustration his German ex-wife had in pronouncing his much longer traditional name. And like his adopted moniker, everything about Pa is stripped back and simple. No shoes and no fancy hiking gear – just an innate understanding of the mountainous tropical landscape we're traversing. His unlined face and muscular physique belie the fact that he's more than 70 years old, testimony to his more than 3700 ascents of the peak, known more formally as Te Rua Manga.

After 40 minutes uphill we reach the base of the Needle. Across a series of rugged valleys, Pa indicates the 653m-high Te Manga, shrouded today in amorphous cloud. Pa has climbed Rarotonga's highest mountain only a mere 800 times – compared to the Needle, it's probably a hike he's still getting his head around.

My own headspace is filled with the green-shrouded spectacle of one of Polynesia's most beautiful islands. Downhill from our exposed bluff, the Cross-Island Track continues for another hour through cloistered and mossy river valleys to end in the cooling haven of the Wigmore Falls.

My appointment with the warm waters of the lagoon may have to wait.

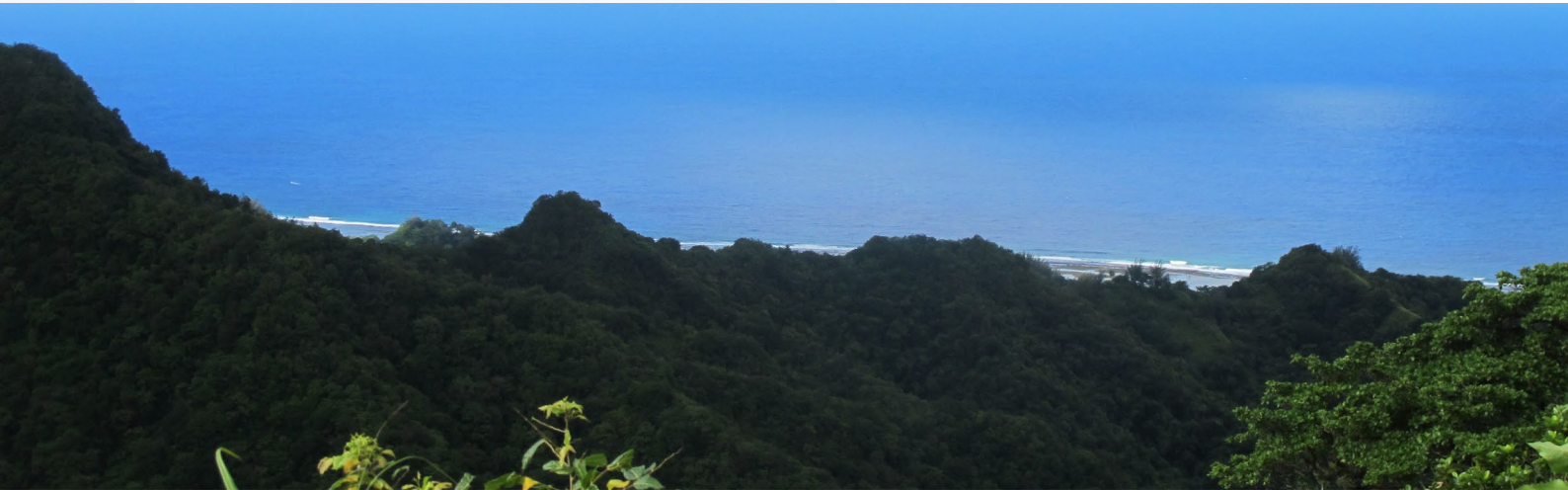


Contact Details

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per person NZ\$60

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Accommodation

Aremango Guesthouse
Muri Beach
Phone +682 24362
www.aremango.co.ck
single/double from NZ\$40/60

Muri Beachcomber
Muri
Phone +682 21022
www.beachcomber.co.ck
apartments from NZ\$275

Tours

Captain Tama's Lagoon Cruises
Phone +682 27350
www.captaintamas.com
adult/child NZ\$70/35

Adventure Cook Islands
Phone +682 22212
www.adventurecookislands.com
Mountain biking, hiking, sea kayaking
and diving.

Shopping

Mike Tavioni's Carving and Sculpture
Phone +682 24003
Ara Metua, Atupa

Punanga Nui Market
Avarua
Visit on a Saturday morning for the best
shopping.

Transport

Air New Zealand
www.airnewzealand.com
Has regular flights from Auckland and
Wellington and operates one weekly flight
linking Rarotonga and Los Angeles.

Pacific Blue
www.flypacificblue.com
Operates flights linking Rarotonga with
Auckland, with convenient connections
through to Australian cities.

On Rarotonga most visitors rent a motor
scooter (per day \$20) or a car (per day
\$60).

Other Attractions

Takitumu Conservation Area
Phone +682 29906
Ara Tapu, Avarua
guided tours adult/child NZ\$50/30

Arai-Te-Tonga Marae
Rarotonga's most important ceremonial
meeting site.

Avana Harbour
Muri
Departure point for the Great Migration
to New Zealand in the 14th century.

Drinking and Dining

The Flame Tree
Muri Beach
Phone +682 25123
www.flametreerestaurant.com
mains NZ\$25-33

Progressive Dinner
Phone +682 20639
per person NZ\$70
Dine at local homes around Rarotonga.

Flying Boat Fish & Chips
Game Fishing Club, Tupapa
Phone +682 22230
mains NZ\$10-15

Fruits of Rarotonga
Tikioki Beach
Phone +682 21509
Fruit juices and tropical smoothies, with
Rarotonga's best snorkelling across
the road.

Rarotonga Sailing Club
Muri Beach
Phone +682 27349