



The Cook Islands – FAQs

<https://www.cookislands.travel/en-AU>

Best time to go

The Cook Islands are pleasantly tropical all year round. From June to August you can expect temperatures in the mid 20s, and you may need a light jacket or jersey at night. This is also the high season for escapees from the Australian and New Zealand winter, so don't leave it to the last minute to book flights and hotels. December through to April see more rain, with the risk of cyclones.

Language

English and Cook Islands Maori are the official languages. About 90% of Islanders can read, write and speak both languages. In Cook Islands Maori, there are 14 letters: a, e, ng, i, k, m, n, o, p, r, t, u, v and the glottal stop which is written as an inverted apostrophe. On the Northern island of Pukapuka, they have their own language. Only 2,000 people in the world speak Pukapukan.

Currency/Money

The New Zealand dollar is the unit of currency. Cook Island currency is also in use locally. Debit and credit cards are readily accepted and ATM's are found in the capital and in a few other places around the islands. Cash converters offer reasonable exchange rates if you have Australian currency at hand.

Tipping is generally not expected or encouraged. However, if a guest wishes to leave a gift for good service then you are welcome to do so directly with the employee or the hotel reception.

Imported foods and products are more expensive. Be aware that fresh dairy products may be less available and will cost a great deal more than in Australia. Most visitors find restaurant meals, take-away food and everyday costs are reasonable. If self-catering, shop at the local markets for cheap fresh produce.

Time Zone

The islands on the eastern side of the international date line and are 10 hours behind GMT. Daylight saving time is not observed - in other words, the clock doesn't go back or forward at any time.

Driving

Foreign driving licences are now accepted in the Islands (previously you had to queue up to get a Cook Islands licence). You are allowed to drive using a full valid licence from your own country (i.e. provisional licences are not acceptable). You can drive only the same class of vehicles as in your home country, and your licence must be in English.

If you do not have a motorcycle class on your license and would like to hire a scooter during your visit, you will need to undergo a driving test at the Cook Islands Police Station in downtown Avarua. Please note that you need to present two forms of ID when applying for your visitor's license; current valid license from you home country and your



passport. Please note that, as of October 2016, all visitors on a visitor's driver's licence must wear a safety helmet while travelling on a motorcycle in Rarotonga. This is compulsory for Rarotonga only and does not apply to visitors driving a motorcycle in the outer islands. We urge all visitors to comply with this new law for your own safety and to avoid any fines from the Cook Islands Police.

Driving is on the left hand side of the road, as in the UK, Australia and New Zealand

Breathalyser testing was introduced in 2008, and if you are involved in an accident, your alcohol consumption could result in a prison sentence. Speed guns are also in use with on the spot fines. The limit on most of the island is 50kph but just 30kph in town (Avarua) and on a stretch of the main road near Muri (between Avana Bridge in Ngatangia and Parengaru Bridge in Titikaveka)

What to Pack

Summer weight clothes + jacket and a pair of jeans for possible breezy evenings. Pack reef shoes, snorkelling gear and a beach towel if you have them, otherwise these are available for hire or purchase (and sometimes included with accommodation) on the island. If you plan to attend a Cook Island Church service (a great cultural experience), be aware that the dress code is white and ladies should wear a dress or skirt (jeans/shorts are not appropriate).

Mobile Phones

Mobile phone services have only been available since the end of 2003 and are provided by TCI (Telecom Cook Islands) using the GSM900 network and both 3G (on Rarotonga) and 2.5G Edge technology for data. You can hire a local mobile in Rarotonga from the Telecom office near CITC. If you want to use your own, your service provider will have to have a roaming arrangement with TCI, or you will need a phone which isn't locked to a provider. Service is available on all islands, but is best on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Find out the latest information about using your mobile in the Islands on the [TCI website](#).

Telecom Cook Islands has also created a SIM card package especially for visitors. The Telecom Traveler card costs NZ\$49 and lasts 30 days. It's preloaded with 20 minutes of local calling, which can be also be used to pay for international calls, 100 text messages and 100MB of data. And when you've used that up, the additional charges are very reasonable. Again, check out the [TCI website page](#) for full details. At the time of writing, no phone Telstra 'Travel Packs' were available for the Cook Islands.

Internet Access

3G services are available on Rarotonga and 2.5G on every other island. There are also plenty of Wi-Fi hotspots on the capital island and quite a few on Aitutaki. If you're on any of the other islands, you'll find at least one near the local Telecom Cook Islands (TCI) office. Some accommodation providers on Mauke and Mangaia (including Babe's Place and Atiu Villas) also have them. Be warned though...connection speeds will seem slow to visitors. The TCI website has [details of all Wi-Fi hotspots](#)

Electricity

Diesel generators provide electricity with output at 240 volts-50 hertz cycle which is the same as the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Mauke have a continuous supply. On the other islands, it's available for at least 12 hours a day.

Australians do not need a power adaptor as the Cook Islands power sockets are of type I (Australian Standard).



Health

Local clinics and the hospital on Rarotonga can treat most injuries but a comprehensive travel insurance policy is recommended.

Vaccinations / Immunisations

No vaccinations are required unless you are arriving from, or transiting through, an area infected with yellow fever within 6 days.

Insect-borne diseases

There is no risk of catching Malaria in the Cook Islands, but there are occasional outbreaks of Dengue Fever. Dengue Fever is transmitted by a daytime-biting mosquito, and travellers are recommended to apply a tropical strength insect repellent to avoid the risk of transmission.

Poisonous insects/animals

There are no poisonous insects or animals on land in the Cook Islands. If you are diving and snorkelling, keep an eye out for Stonefish, Crown of Thorns Starfish, Cone Snail (Cone Shell) and Lion Fish. Although these are not common in the Cooks, they are venomous marine creatures which should be avoided and never touched or handled. Reef shoes should be worn in the water at all times.



Stonefish



Crown of Thorns Starfish



Cone Shell



Lionfish



Water

Rarotonga and Aitutaki have reticulated water supply systems. Water usage is not charged. On the other islands of the Southern Group limited reticulation is provided and augmented by rainwater catchment and storage. The atolls of the Northern Group rely on rainwater from roof catchments. Water is precious in the islands, so please use it thoughtfully.

Local 'wildlife'

Be aware that roosters, hens and chickens roam freely. It is usual to encounter a hen with chicks wandering through the airport or perhaps around your table at a café in town. The local roosters love to rouse a tourist by occasionally commencing their pre-dawn crowing from beneath accommodation flooring. Dogs also roam freely although programs are in place to address and reduce their number.

General health & safety

Just a few years ago, it could be said that you were more likely to be hit by a falling coconut than be a victim of crime. That's still absolutely true in the outer islands, Rarotonga however, has seen an increase in the incidence of crime over recent times. With tourists seeming to have become targets, the message from the police is not to abandon your common sense. Don't leave valuables lying around if, for example, you're going swimming or snorkeling. The top box or space under the seat on a scooter is not a safe place to store things. Lock away cash, jewellery and other valuables in a hotel safe. All that said, crime is still relatively rare.