



Travel

Travel Editor Sarah-Kate Lynch

5 reasons to love the PACIFIC ISLANDS

There's a pocket of paradise here for every budget

Summer's officially over, but that doesn't have to mean an end to the sun, sand and surf. What's the point of being in the Pacific Ocean if we can't venture out to visit our neighbours when the weather gets a little gloomy?

1 Tonga
New Caledonia might be a tiny bit closer, but Tonga won my heart when I visited the main island, Tongatapu, and the gorgeous northern Vava'u group last year. The scenery is stunning – most of Tonga's 170 islands are uninhabited and the little isles appear out of nowhere like perfectly iced cake crumbs. My favourite crumb is tiny Mounu, where the Bowe family will show you a fantastic time at their four-fale resort. Go between July and September for the spectacular whale-watching.

2 Fiji
North-west of Tonga lie the Fijian islands, famously family-friendly and hopefully recovering from Cyclone Winston, which a friend of mine somehow slept right through. I have a new bucket-list destination in Fiji – Dolphin Island. Just 20 minutes by boat from the tip of the biggest isle, Viti Levu, this glorious gem from the same stable as Huka Lodge

sleeps just eight people. The island is all yours for the duration of your stay, so let's all go there. (Just eight at a time, of course.)

3 Cook Islands
East of Tonga, this collection, of which Rarotonga is the most-visited, made swanky *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine's list of their top 20 destinations last year. Kiwis love it because it's laid-back and you can rent a house to keep your costs down. Maybe try glamping at the new Ikurangi Eco Retreat or cycle around the island from Ride Rarotonga, stopping for a snifter at Shipwreck Hut at the Aro'a Beachside Inn. If you ever get the chance to go to the smaller island of Aitutaki, it's an even more low-key escape from the modern hustle and bustle, with lovely people and the usual snorkelling, diving and walking options.

4 Easter Island
Halfway between New Zealand and South America, Easter Island – also known as Rapa Nui – is politically a part of Chile, but is actually the eastern-most point of Polynesia, with the similarly remote Pitcairn Islands as its nearest neighbours and Tahiti 4000km away. Forget white-sand beaches, palm trees and tropical cocktails – the top attractions on this remote

Pacific island are rocks. With only primitive technology, the ancient Rapa Nui people carved awe-inspiringly huge stone heads (moai) from a central volcano, some of them with jaunty red hats, then transported them all around the lunar landscape to stare out at the sea. How and why is still hotly debated, but a local guide can lend some insight as you hike across the otherworldly island to discover the mystery for yourself. It's our Associate Editor Sebastian's favourite place in the world.

5 Hawaii
Far north of New Zealand, but still very much part of the Pacific, are the Hawaiian Islands. They're increasingly popular destinations with Kiwis now that Hawaiian Airlines will fly us there, and Jetstar too if you travel via Melbourne. Out of the three islands I've visited, Maui is my favourite for its beauty and chilled-out rocker vibe. As a Fleetwood Mac fan, I was compelled to go to Mick's own restaurant, Fleetwood's on Front St, in Lahana. If you were there earlier this month, you would have seen him perform with his blues band. But Elvis fans might prefer to check out the wildly popular show *Burn'n Love* at the Maui Theatre, almost next door. It's the TripAdvisor fave.



Kick back and enjoy the slow pace of island time in the sleepy Polynesian paradise of Tonga.



The dramatic cliffs and sparkling waters of Kauai make it a hot fave with Hollywood filmmakers.



For your own movie-star getaway, hire out Fiji's Dolphin Island for you and your seven besties.