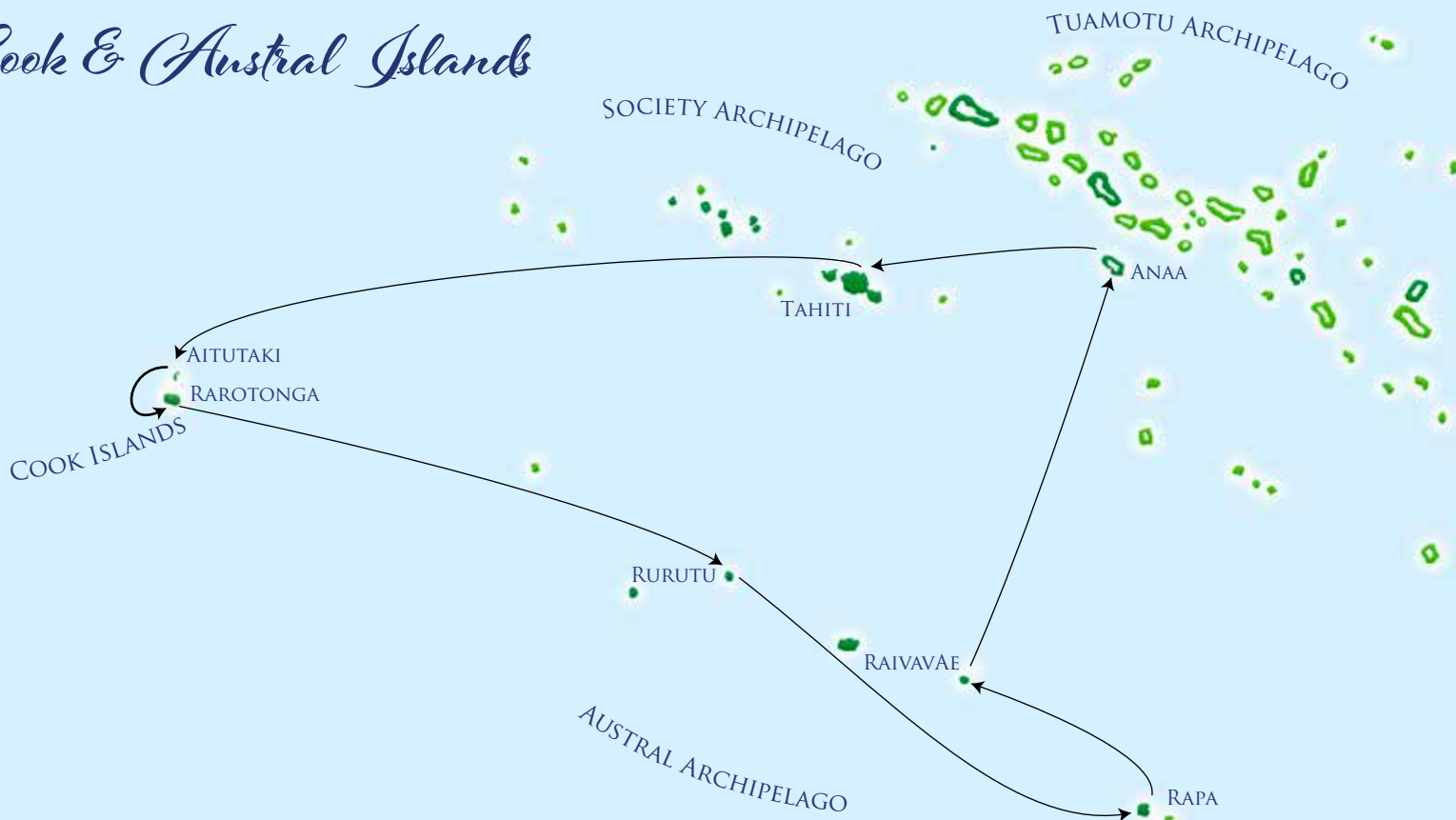


Cook & Austral Islands



SATURDAY DEPARTURE

Day 1, Saturday:	Papeete	Day 8, Saturday:	Rapa, Austral
Day 2, Sunday:	At Sea	Day 9, Sunday:	Raivavae, Austral
Day 3, Monday:	Aitutaki, Cook Islands	Day 10, Monday:	At Sea
Day 4, Tuesday:	Rarotonga, Cook Islands	Day 11, Tuesday:	Anaa, Tuamotu
Day 5, Wednesday:	Rurutu, Austral	Day 12, Wednesday:	At Sea
Day 6, Thursday:	At Sea	Day 13, Thursday:	Papeete
Day 7, Friday:	Rapa, Austral		

A Shared History

Due to their proximity, the Southern Group of the Cook Islands and the Austral Islands have a long shared past of cultural ties, trade and even warfare. Traditional oral history recounts the settlement of Rarotonga in the Southern Cooks by the people of Tubuai, in the Austral Islands, around 1,200 years ago. Other ancient stories tell of the migration of Polynesians from the Society Islands and even as far as the Marquesas to Rarotonga, however the dialect from

the Southern Cooks and Austral Islands resemble one another the most. While the Rimatara lorikeet, or Ura in the local dialect, is named after one of the islands in the Austral archipelago, this bird from the parrot family was once endemic to the Southern Cook Islands where it is known as the Kura. As Aranui Cruises follows their original migratory path, you will discover one more aspect of Polynesia.

The Cook Islands

Once part of the British Empire, and now a self-governing country in free association with New Zealand, the Cook Islands have maintained their Polynesian identity. From the various island dialects, all originating from the old Maori (Maohi in Tahitian) language, to the arts and crafts, dancing and performing arts, the traditional culture and customs have remained strong. Less affected by development and tourism unlike some of its neighbors in the South Pacific, the Cook Islands have been described as Hawaii over 60 years ago. This idyllic group of 15 islands, divided between the Northern and Southern Cook Islands, was named in honor of Captain James Cook, who visited in the late 18th Century.



Rarotonga

The largest and most populous, Rarotonga is the hub of the Cook Islands, with its chief town, Avarua, as its capital. Settled by Polynesians from French Polynesia around the 9th century, the bond with Tahiti and her islands has always remained strong. Today, as modern Pacific people, the high spirited Cook Islanders are a cosmopolitan blend of Western influence and ancient Polynesian heritage. Many important archeological sites can be found here, such as Arai Te Tonga, the most sacred marae in Rarotonga, and nearby, the Ara Metua, a thousand-year-old interior road, paved with basalt or coral slabs, that once circled the island and of which, about two thirds still exists. Highland Paradise, sometimes known as "the lost village" is now a cultural center consisting of old and faithfully rebuilt traditional structures, offering guided tours of the once large settlement site, and re-enactments and cultural demonstrations.

Photos, top to bottom, left to right: The Kia Orana Aunties, Rarotonga; Island of Rarotonga; Unveiling an umu (underground oven), Rarotonga; Snorkeling in Aitutaki; Aitutaki Lagoon; Woven hat and bag, Rarotonga; Traditional ship's bow, Aitutaki. Photos © David Strickland



Aitutaki

Another island paradise in the South Pacific, Aitutaki has it all: gorgeous white sand beaches and a stunning turquoise lagoon surrounded by motus on the barrier reef. Though considered an atoll, it has a significant large area of high land on the north side, providing sweeping views across the lagoon. According to legend, the island was settled by Ru, who sailed from Raiatea in the Society Islands in search of new lands and many Aitutakians believe they are descended from this seafaring warrior. Today, they are known for their charm, easy going attitude and hospitality. Whether relaxing on the beach, snorkeling the crystal clear lagoon in search of colorful tropical fish and corals, or discovering remnants of an ancient past, Aitutaki offers the best of both worlds.

Rurutu

One of two of the largest raised atolls in French Polynesia, the island formation of Rurutu is not what one expects to see in the South Pacific. Basaltic and limestone cliffs dotted with caves where the islanders once lived, a volcanic interior with a lush tropical jungle, white sand beaches and beautiful bays create stunning visuals. The island's fertile soil and cooler climate are ideal for growing cabbage, lettuce and potatoes as well as coffee and taro. Archeological digs have uncovered habitation sites, council platforms and marae temples in the village of Vitaria, showing man's presence around 900 A.D. Rurutu is known throughout Polynesia for the exceptionally fine quality of its woven products, creating magnificent hats, bags and baskets, or mats from pandanus leaves and other natural materials. From August to October each year, humpback whales can be seen and heard in Rurutu, where they come south to mate and give birth. As *Aranui 5* will be here in September, this should be a feast for your eyes and ears.



Photos, top to bottom, left to right: Cliffs, Rurutu; Smiling tiki, Raivavae; Island of Raivavae; Woven hat, Rapa; Ahurei Bay, Rapa.

Rapa

As you approach Rapa, only accessible by sea, the Captain may announce: "Welcome to Rapa. Next stop Antarctica." As the southernmost inhabited island, this crescent shaped island — with a fjord-like coastline deeply indented by 12 bays — is as remote as it gets in French Polynesia. Rapa-Iti — or "small Rapa", as the island is also called — has a strong cultural connection to Easter Island, known as Rapa-Nui or big to the Polynesians. Legend tells of the settlement of Rapa-Nui by the people of Rapa-Iti. Once home to fierce warriors who lived in fortified settlements built on terraces among volcanic peaks, the islanders now live by farming and fishing. During our visit, you will be greeted by the unique dances of Rapa. You may choose one of two different hikes offered. The first goes from the village of Area around the stunning bay to the main village of Ahurei and the second, to the remnant of an old mountaintop fort. A traditional lunch will be served on shore.

Raivavae

Known as the "Bora Bora of the Austral Islands", Raivavae's white sand beaches, large emerald lagoon and 28 motus encircling the lush green main island, have earned it this distinction. Giant stone tikis resembling those in the Marquesas and on Easter Island, including an unusual smiling tiki, wood sculptures, an open air marae temple and Polynesian canoes are some of the archaeological elements you will discover during a circle island tour. If you wish to relax on one of the motus and swim in the crystal clear lagoon, an excursion by speed boat is available. A beach barbecue featuring local dishes will be served for lunch.

