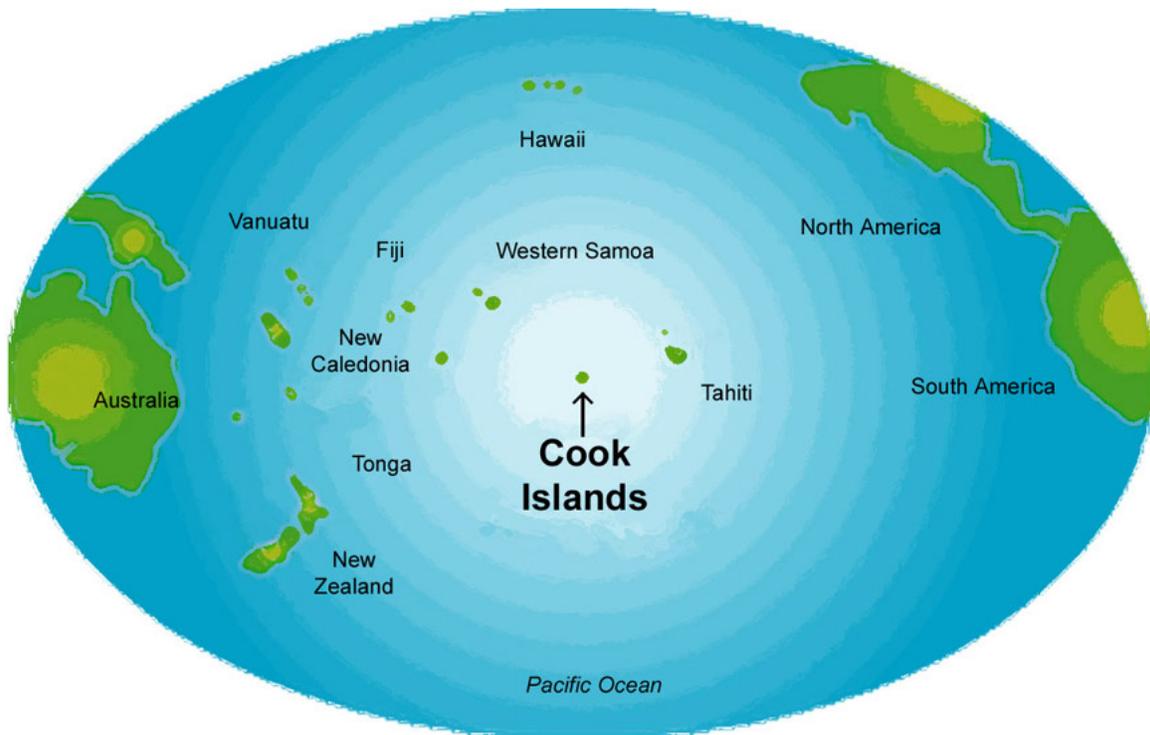


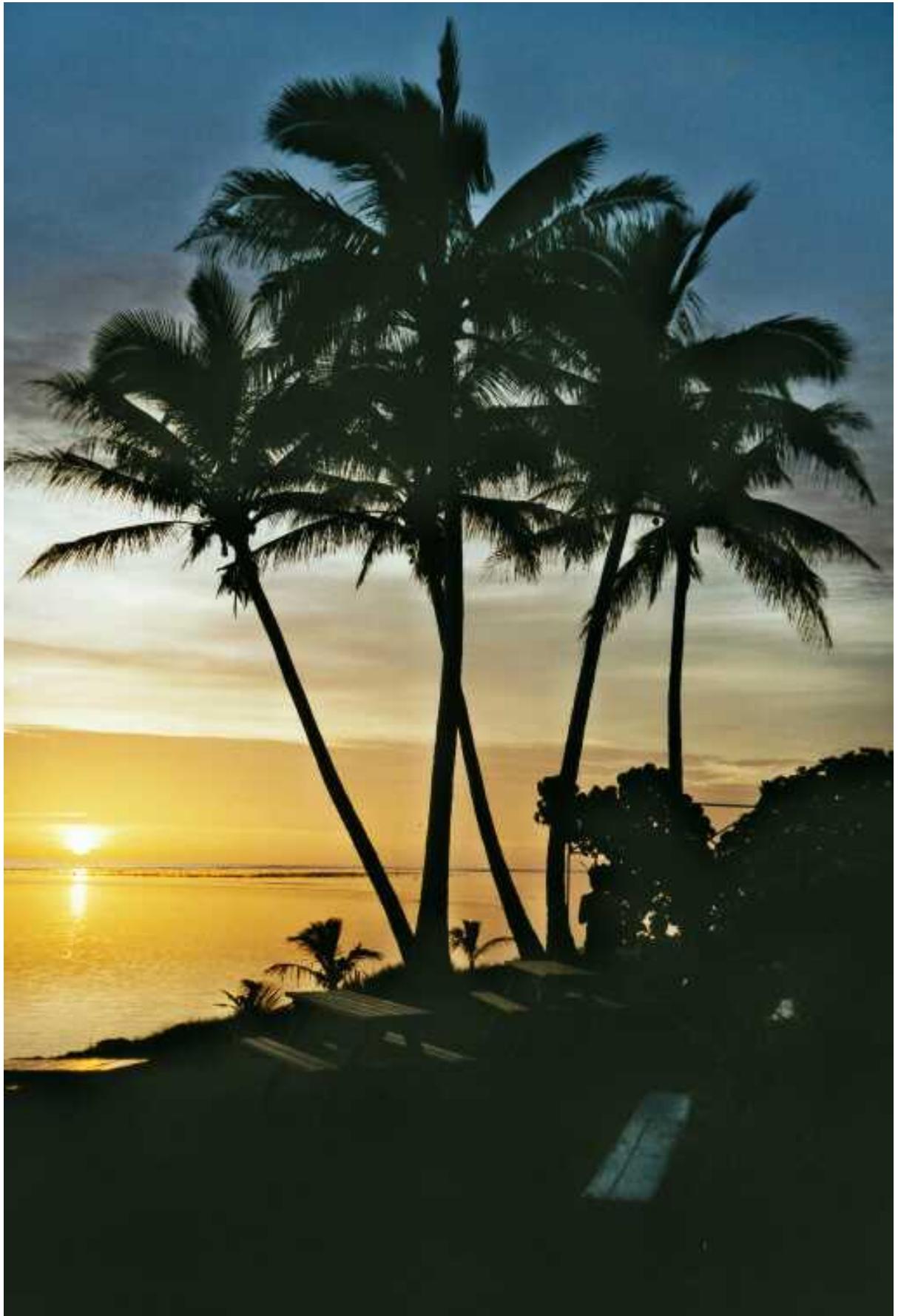
COOK ISLANDS

An Adventure in the Middle of Nowhere

18.02.2002 – 19.03.2002



*A travel diary by
Jakob Faber and Stefan Broda*



Contents:

Travel Route	4
Why Traveling To The Cook Islands?	5
18.02.02 – The Date Of Departure	5
19.02.02 – The Longest Day	6
20.02.02 – The Arrival	8
21.02.02 – The Long Walk	10
22.02.02 – The Party	11
23.02.02 – Great Snorkeling And Bad Sunburn.....	12
24.02.02 – Shake, Rattle And Puke.....	14
25.02.02 – Searching Accommodation On Aitutaki.....	16
26.02.02 – Around The Island.....	18
27.02.02 – Fast Chicken And Fast Rhythm	21
28.02.02 – The Lagoon-Cruise	22
01.03.02 – The Big Sweating	26
02.03.02 – Motorbike: Learning By Doing!	29
03.03.02 – Sunday Conversations And Fruits Of Rarotonga	31
04.03.02 – Toxic Waste And Big Sub Sandwich	32
05.03.02 – BBQ And Good Bye.....	33
06.03.02 – Business And Snorkeling.....	34
07.03.02 – The New World.....	35
08.03.02 – Motus And Heavy Downpour.....	36
09.03.02 – Cave Exploration On Atiu	37
10.03.02 – The Big Tour	40
11.03.02 – Snorkeling And Crab Hunt	42
12.03.02 – The Big Disaster	44
13.03.02 – Health Improvement And Boredom	47
14.03.02 – Oh... Sweet Liberty!	48
15.03.02 – The Strong Current.....	48
16.03.02 – Sharks	50
17.03.02 – Dirt And Mud.....	51
18.03.02 – Good Bye Cook Islands	60
19.03.02 – The Shortest Day	62
Final Words	63

Travel Route



1. Arrival in Rarotonga (main island)
2. Going by boat to Aitutaki
3. Back to Rarotonga by air plane

4. Trip to Atiu by plane
5. Plane trip straight to Rarotonga hospital

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Why Traveling To The Cook Islands?

After traveling around in Cameroon last year which often turned out to be extremely exhausting and chaotic, we have decided this time – again influenced by alcoholic drinks - to visit a more quiet and relaxing place on our planet.

As Jakob is very interested in remote islands he proposed the Cook Islands which are said to be the whole of Polynesia in a small but scattered package. The variety of islands goes from volcanic origin (Rarotonga), one of the most beautiful lagoons in the world (Aitutaki), over raised coral reefs (Atiu) to fascinating atolls in the north (Manihiki and Penrhyn). Additionally, the official language is English and all in all they haven't become a target of mainstream tourism, yet.

Stefan immediately agreed as the white beaches, the clear and turquoise water with its visibility of up to 60 meters as well as the unique beautiful coral reefs enable him to make use of his diving license he obtained last year. And anyway, how the heck is living like on such an isolated spot of the world? The food, the traditions, the dance, the people... we will discover all that within the next month.

Important Notice:

This diary is not an objective report about our experiences. It is a description of the particular perceptions of our journey. Please do not be upset if you find some rude expressions every now and then. They are not supposed to insult anybody but rather to better describe our emotions in that special situation.

We preferred to write the whole diary in present tense in order for you to better get a feeling that you directly observe everything. We hope you will enjoy our diary!

18.02.02 – The Date Of Departure

We get up rather early and meet in Freiburg downtown to buy some last equipment for our discovery including traveler checks, films, underwater-cameras, a snorkel, rice and vitamins and sun protection cream. We also sign a health insurance for foreign countries. Just a note... everything on the day of departure ...

After our last lunch at home, Cristina (Stefan's mother) gives us a ride to a place where we can begin hitchhiking towards Frankfurt, where our plane leaves. As we are not properly dressed for



a German winter (only a t-shirt) we are happy that it doesn't take more than just ten minutes that someone picks us up. Alex, a female real estate journalist from Wiesbaden takes us to Darmstadt, a city near Frankfurt. Five minutes after we entered the car it begins to rain. It is very comfortable in her limousine, much better than getting wet outside. In Darmstadt, Alex drops us right in front of the *Maritim Hotel*. We start raising our thumb again until we realize that there is a bus station about five meters on our left, where the airport-shuttle stops frequently. What a coincidence!

Waiting for the bus, we still try to be picked up by a car, but it has become dark and rains heavily and anyway, no one takes us with him. So we finally take the bus. At the airport, we are expecting that the flight-ticket can also be used for official means of transport around Frankfurt which unfortunately is not the case. But the driver luckily doesn't charge us for the ride – what a nice guy.

We check in at the *Lufthansa* terminal and accomplish to change our reservation into aisle-seats so that we can extend our long legs from time to time. We ask for the possibility of using official means of transport with our flight-tickets and are recommended to pretend stupidity. Satisfied by this answer, we take the S-Bahn to Oberursel, a suburb of Frankfurt, where Donata, the daughter of family-friends of Cristina, waits for us. At her place, we have a very nice dinner (eight slices of bread and half a Pizza each) and watch TV. Later, Rüdiger and Elisabeth, the parents, arrive and we all go to bed soon afterwards. But before sleeping, we do our first series of push-ups which we intend to do every day on our trip in order to minimize the loss of muscles during our trip. Thinking about the day, we realize that we traveled from Freiburg to the airport and to Oberursel without spending a cent... oh yeah!

19.02.02 – The Longest Day

During the night, we wake up very often and finally get up at seven o'clock. Elisabeth has prepared a very nice breakfast for us and we enjoy her tremendous hospitality. At eight o'clock, she brings us to the train station from where we get to the airport, again without spending a cent. What a nice country that we are leaving!



Unfortunately, at 9am (our boarding time), we are still in Frankfurt's main train station. A little nervous, we arrive at 9.20 at the safety-controls. We realize that security efforts have been extended a lot as we have to pass two metal-detectors and even need to put off our German army boots. Our heart rate cools down when we are told that the plane is late for 30 minutes anyway.



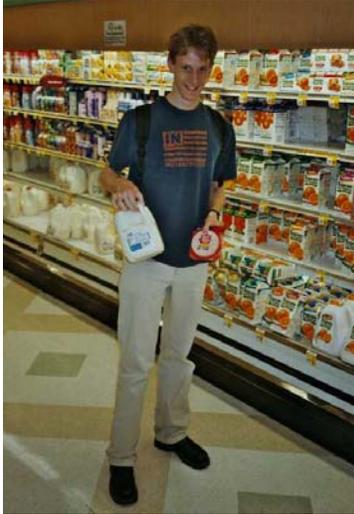
We take our seats and take off at least one hour late. We start learning some basic Cook Islands-Maori-vocabulary and study the Lonely Planet Guide. *Kia Orana* will be our "Hello" and *Meitaki Ma'ata* our "Good Bye" and "Thank You" for the next month. Right now, we are still sitting in the plane, have just started writing the first pages of our diary and are waiting for dinner at half past ten in the morning (Los Angeles-time). Unfortunately, clouds limit our view on Greenland, Canada and the United States.

The captain seems to be a little bit confused. He announces that the flight goes to San Francisco. After a while, he asks the passengers for a doctor (hopefully not for himself!). Eleven hours later, we arrive in Los Angeles. Customs and the declaration of our food (rice) turn out to be very easy. We just go to *Air New Zealand* and check in. The short woman there reminds Stefan that his American passport is expired since a couple of months. Fortunately it is no problem to continue traveling as a German. We pass the security check and have a look at our gate. As this part of the airport is very limited and the time until take-off seems infinite, we ask some *Air New Zealand* ground personnel where we can get some good Burritos (Tex-Mex Food).

We leave the airport and walk to Westchester. On our way, we notice that the air is much polluted and that planes cross the sunset just hundred meters above us. We finally find the notorious Mexican diner: *El Tarasco*. The menu is full of Mexican expressions which we don't understand even a little bit. After a short consultation with the cute waitress, we order two Burritos, which taste very good and make our noses running as we add some very spicy Mexican sauce (*Hay, que chingo de picante, cabrón!*).



On our way back to the airport we still have lots of time and decide to visit *Ralph's*, a huge supermarket. We are enchanted seeing that we can get anything fat free here, even salami (yummy!). After this nutrition research about American products, we continue our walk. The sun is setting which makes this place look very nice. But wait a minute: we will not leave the American continent without a hamburger in our stomach. So we take the chance and enter the *In 'n' Out* fast-food restaurant where we order two cheeseburgers which they prepare for us right away. Well filled, we return to the airbase which presents itself in wonderful colors.



After Stefan got a new boarding pass (due to the loss of the first one) we pass the security check again. This time, Jakob seems to be very suspicious as they check his shoes as well as the whole content of his bag for explosives. During that time, Stefan has a little chat with two air force soldiers both armed with M16s – well, indeed, very suitable for closed room combat.

We wash ourselves in the restrooms and board the plane for another nine-hours-flight which our backs are already looking forward to. *Air New Zealand* outranks *Lufthansa* regarding space, comfort, food and the beauty of the stewardesses. Now, the entertainment show begins with *Bandits*, an American movie shown to us only in German. As except for us two, nobody understands a word, the situation is very funny. Later, we get dinner, meanwhile the sixth meal for us today. This was our longest day ever (35 hours).

20.02.02 – The Arrival

One hour earlier than scheduled we arrive at Rarotonga International Airport at about two o'clock in the morning. Leaving the plane we are immediately pushed back by the enormous humidity and heat. We want to take a picture of the plane but the lens of our camera steams up at once.

The staff at the airport is rather unfriendly but security checks are no problem and need no longer than three minutes. Outside the airport, Piri Puruto III, the self-crowned Coconut King, awaits us and drives us to his hostel. For his age of 61 years, he is a muscular, tanned and handsome Casanova to whose claws many female tourists have fallen victims. The double bedroom is located 20 meters next to the beach.

He tells us that we generally don't need to worry about our valuables and luggage since we can just leave the doors open all the time. With our African experience still in our mind, we heavily doubt that. But we are to be proven wrong since crime on these islands almost doesn't exist due to the fact that everybody knows each other. In the Polynesian culture, property is something that needs to be shared among everyone. People don't really consider themselves as owner of something in a European way and tolerate that other people borrow their things without asking. Foreigner's belongings are exceptions which they respect.

It is three o'clock in the morning - we go to bed. During the night we experience our first heavy tropical thunderstorm and it is winding even inside our well-isolated room. We rest until seven o'clock but cannot sleep properly.



Getting up, we are able to see a part of the stunning beauty of the island: small mountains covered by rainforest dipped into misty clouds make up the interior. We really have to hike there and explore this dense jungle! Furthermore, there is a large lagoon between the beach and the 500 meters distant coral reef which protects the island from the strong pacific currents which together with the very high waves would make swimming a little uncomfortable.

During coconut breakfast we meet a couple from Sweden traveling around in Polynesia and Melanesia. Soon later, we go snorkeling. A great experience: even inside the small lagoon in front of our hostel where the depth is only about one meter, we see lots of corals in different shape (brain, balloon, and alien space vessel in green, blue, white...) and fishes in different sizes and beautiful colors. The ground is covered by sea cucumbers (or rori how the natives call them). Parts of these slimy little creatures are supposed to be a delicacy here. We would like to find that out later. As there is a strong wind blowing, we begin to feel cold after an hour. Leaving the water as a result, we join Piri Puruto III to Avarua, the capital which is populated by about 2,500 Maoris.

We get some cash at the bank and buy some food. Unfortunately, we notice that food in the supermarkets is rather expensive, especially imported conserves from New Zealand. We also go to *Taoi International Shipping* and check the ship connections to the northern islands. We are very disappointed as we are told that boats do only leave about once a month. We would have to return by plane which is horrifyingly expensive.

Still shocked by this information we write some e-mails and buy some liquid for Stefan's contact lenses. Afterwards we see two freaky English twins staying at the same hostel as we do obtaining their Cook Islands driving license. We also meet an Australian girl's touch ball team recommending us to watch them play against the native team which we agree to do as Cook Islanders are very interested in sports.

Taking the bus back to the hostel, we see Muri Beach and decide to relocate during the next days. It is absolutely beautiful there: four motus (small islands) are inside the lagoon and easy to reach. Each one of these looks totally different and particular. Some are sandy, others are rocky and one of them is covered by dense jungle. We just have to explore these places.



In the bus, Stefan talks to a very young native boy who confirms that learning the traditional Maori dances is a compulsory subject at school. Back at the hostel, we go for another lagoon-exploration and start preparing dinner: rice cooked with water and coconut-cream, served with fried potatoes and green pepper. While eating, we hang around with the English blokes and their friend Daren who gives us some tasty *Raro Lager*. At nine o'clock, we are very tired and go to bed.

21.02.02 – The Long Walk

We get up at about half past six and meet an older woman from Santa Barbara, who has just arrived at Piri's. We invite her to have breakfast with us which consists of coconut-rice, jam and toast. Right now, we are lying on our bed and make plans to go snorkeling again. We take our gear and walk to the reef. Reaching the edge we decide not to cross it as it is extremely slippery, the corals are razor-sharp and waves and currents are very strong. After walking along the reef we find a gap between two walls made of corals going down 20-30 meters. We cannot see the ground but after a few minutes, we just jump into the unknown abyss.



The cliff is full of caves where big fishes rest. It is a kind of spooky atmosphere. We see interesting coral formations and colorful fishes which reach sizes up to half a meter. Every time we go down, we discover new things. We feel like men, exploring areas where no one else had been before. And when we feel brave enough we dive deeper and deeper into the big blue until we see the ground far away and even larger fishes. This is the best snorkeling experience we have ever had. Before we came to the Cook Islands, we could never imagine how much there is to see under water. What a pity, that we didn't shoot more photos. But we will keep the memories of this day and its beautiful scenery forever in our mind.

Still fascinated about the new world we have just discovered, we take the bus to the capital to visit the touch-ball-game. Unfortunately we miss the right crossroad and have to walk all around the airport. Oh man... the bloody airstrip just won't end. Hey! We came to watch sports, not to do sports. The sun is burning and it is very hot. But on our way, we pass an elementary school and are able to watch the pupils having their dancing-lesson. This looks very nice: boys and girls are standing outside in front of the teacher who shows them the ancient choreography. Their dance is so fascinating: while arms move in a very gentle way, the hips move very well coordinated in rhythm whereas the feet stand still on the ground. The roundabout way was really worth it!

With an hour delay we arrive at the stadium filled by the whole school watching the matches. We do not understand too much about the rules but it is easy to notice that all the Cook Islands-teams are all beaten up badly. Close to desperation, they don't even score one single time, but nevertheless it is a nice atmosphere and people are already cheering when their team just gains a few meters which does not happen too often. And by the way, the girl teams are really hot!

Later we take the bus to Muri Beach and make a reservation at *Vara's*, a nice and cheap hostel. As the next bus will not depart before one and a half hours we start walking back to Piri's. We see a lot of small crabs and cancers and a big dead fish covered by spikes. The temperature is very high and the ground is very soft so the walk is very exhausting. We soon run out of water but fortunately meet some nice Canadians who give us some from the tap of their cottage. We have a very nice conversation with them.

After fifteen kilometers or two hours, we arrive totally dead. Unfortunately, Jakob got strong sunburn on his neck and we both got lots of blisters on our feet. Our army boots are just not the best shoes for a long beach walk. We cook again some coconut-rice, eat it and go to bed immediately.

22.02.02 – The Party

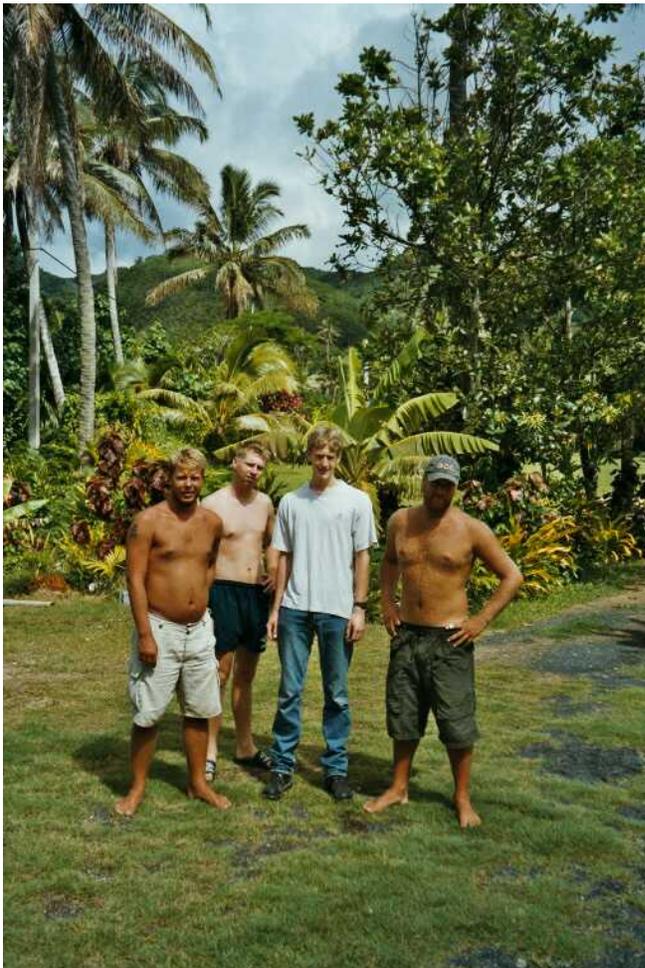
We get up quite early, leave Piri's and split up. Jakob who does not want to show his red neck to the sun, takes our luggage, checks in at *Vara's* and washes our clothes while Stefan buys food and collects information about transportation timetables and prices for the boat ride to Aitutaki. When Stefan arrives at *Vara's*, we make plans for the following weeks. We would like to see three more outer islands in the southern part of the Cook Islands since exploring the very north is too pricy by plane and not possible by boat.

Snorkeling around in the lagoon later, Stefan realizes that this part of Rarotongan beach is quite boring underwater. No corals and a lot of sand, nothing compared to the beach at Vaima'anga, where Piri's hostel is located.

In the evening we have some beer and go out with other travelers. First, we arrive at a place called *Staircase* where mainly white people amuse themselves. There is a karaoke show going on and after our ears had been offended by some very embarrassing performances, we take the microphone and sing some Elvis-songs. Stefan starts with *Hound Dog* but has some problems as the text sometimes appears too late on the screen. Right afterwards, Jakob sings *Return To Sender* and rocks the boat. After a while he may sing the last song of the evening called *Don't Be Cruel*. These are the times when his usually unpopular music taste bears fruits and makes him popular for the evening.

After these performances we leave the white tourism-party and go to *TJs* where mostly local youngsters hang out. Chris and Slobodan, two guys from Sweden who stay in the same dormitory at *Vara's* as we do, join us. Jakob regrets that they play black music like in German discos but Stefan starts to dance with the locals who are mostly enormously fat girls. The Maoris just can't cope with sugar. Most of the boys are totally drunk and some of the "whales" ask Stefan for a dance who cannot refuse as this would be considered as a tremendous insult. However, some of the girls are pretty well-shaped and really know how to move their butt. Unfortunately, they are hardly seen on the dance floor. Full of sweat we catch the last bus at 1.30 and go back to *Vara's*.

23.02.02 – Great Snorkeling And Bad Sunburn



We get up at ten o'clock and have a fried potato-breakfast. As planned the day before, we make a trip to Avarua Harbour to snorkel around with Chris (first from the left) and Slobodan (first from the right). There is also a Welsh guy (second from the left) staying in our room but as he has fallen into a state of complete laziness and motionlessness, he doesn't even bother to answer to our invitation to join us for the trip. After a long walk across the unpopulated outrigger islands we reach a small passage to the ocean whose depth varies between two and twenty meters, visibility from ten to thirty meters.

From the beginning we see lots of colorful tropical fishes and interesting coral formations including small valleys and caves. Especially these small canyon-like structures are very fun to swim through. Chris and Slobodan who are more experienced than we are discover a white-red-striped 1,5meter-eel which they provoke with a stick to come out of its hideout. Its head looks similar to a moray one's but is smaller and therefore not as dangerous.

Later, we even see a grand moray itself in eleven meters of depth which moves half a meter out of its hole scanning us thoroughly. But this time we don't dare to provoke this animal as we might still need our fingers. It is amazing how deep we can get and what fishes we see (a swarm of about one meter long trumpet fishes among others).



In some places, the current is very strong. Even with our flippers we do not move for several seconds and are suddenly pushed forwards several meters at once. But not only are we moved back and forth by the currents, whole swarms of fishes are equally affected. This creates the strange impression that we, the water with its particles and the fishes do not move while the ground and rocks are moving. We really have to be careful not to be smashed against any corals. But this underwater-world here is absolutely beautiful and exciting. It outranks everything we have ever seen before and can easily compete with the reef gap we explored earlier at Piri's (whereas we are less nervous this time).

After two and a half hours we arrive at our hostel again and both have strong sunburn. Whereas Stefan's skin just reddened and burns, Jakob's left shoulder was obviously exposed with even less sun protection which hurts like fire. Afterwards we go to Avarua to buy some food for Aitutaki that we are going to visit the next day. In the evening we join a tuna-buffet which some of the other guests have prepared (we pay 5NZ\$ each) and have a chat with Thomas, a German guy from Bavaria, as well as with Slobodan and Chris. We go to bed at half past ten.

24.02.02 – Shake, Rattle And Puke

We get up at nine in the morning, pack our stuff and take the bus to Avatiu harbor. We buy our tickets at the shipping office and when we ask when the ship leaves we are told "at twelve o'clock. But hey where are you guys from?" – "From Germany." – "Oh... aeehh... the ship might also leave at about one minute after twelve". Still laughing we inspect the vessel which is smaller than we expected. Including us this 42 years old Norwegian cargo ship carries only seven passengers. Our cabin is just next to the engine and hence quite loud and very hot. It is also extremely small and the length of our beds is certainly less than 180cm with an approximate width of maybe 50 centimeters. It will be hardly possible to sleep in here.



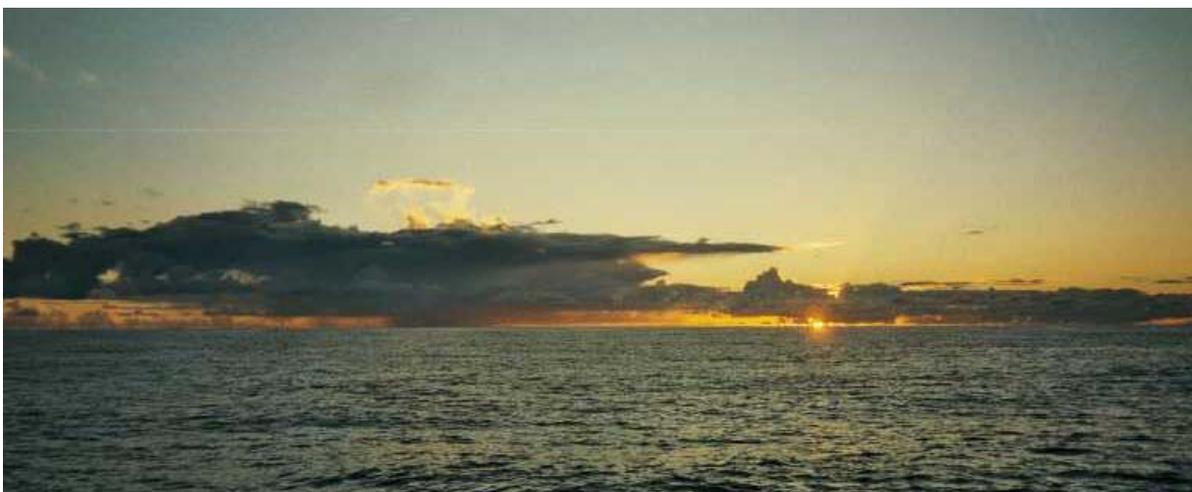
The ship departs at one o'clock – shocked, we realize that this is exactly 59 minutes later than the office clerk has told us before. We seriously consider canceling the whole journey and returning to Germany immediately. But since we have already left the reef by now, we will have about 24 hours to reconsider.

The boat moves rather slowly as we can still see Rarotonga clearly after one hour even though it has started to rain a bit which limits our view. Reaching the deep sea, Wayne, a Kiwi (a person from New Zealand) with impressive sailing experience, estimates the depth to be up to four thousand meters. Here, we see several flying fishes which we have never seen before. They fly up to 50 meters far – just like a bird. What a freaky animal!



The sea is said to be smooth but nevertheless the boat is shaking a lot. Whereas this does not affect Jakob's stomach, Stefan gets pretty seasick. He stays outside and tries to focus on the horizon but this doesn't help much. He cannot even eat a whole dinner so that Jakob gets even more of this really delicious food the cook prepared not only for the crew but also for the seven passengers. It is by far the best food we have had on the Cook Islands so far and we plan to imitate the tasty salad with onions back in Germany.

The sunset over the sea is one of the most beautiful one's we have ever seen. The color of the sky goes from dark blue to orange and the sun's golden light gently touches the horizon. It is the first time that we can see the sunset from different directions. It still looks spectacular when we turn our backs towards the sun. We also see clouds causing heavy tropical downpour far away from our boat.





During the trip we have nice discussions with two Americans called Tom and Vincent and Wayne. An Australian guy provides for the important insight that unemployment is necessary in every country to keep the employed population motivated to continue working hard.

When Stefan goes to our small and stuffy cabin quite early, he feels so sick that he just pukes out of the bull's eye. Fortunately, he directly hits the water... what a nutritious meal for our friends in the sea. Vomiting helps and when Jakob goes to the cabin, too, we are both happy to find some hours of sleep.

25.02.02 – Searching Accommodation On Aitutaki

While Jakob sleeps until half past six, Stefan is already up since four o'clock and watches the stars after a small breakfast (toast and cacao). He feels much better now. After the very shiny moon set, he sees a lot of stars and the Milky Way decorated by some shooting stars. Feeling so bad the day before, he enjoys this peaceful moment so much. Time does not seem to exist. Well, at least not for exactly two hours before the sun rises.

Three hours before the arrival we can see a lot of Aitutaki's islands which look as idyllic as in a south-pacific-brochure. We are fascinated by the different colors of the water which sometimes is dark blue and sometimes brightly turquoise.



Reaching Aitutaki's outer reef, the crew throws the anchor as the lagoon is not deep enough for the boat and two barges chug towards us. The crew swings the cargo on them by crane. And after two

hours we border the small nutshell as well by climbing down a fairly old ladder. We slowly leave the vessel's vicinity and can't wait to step on land.



At the harbor, we meet some very nice locals who offer us to bring us on their pick up to *Tiare's Maori Guest House* where we intend to stay. When we arrive there, we cannot see anyone in this dilapidated house and decide to wait for someone to show up. After half an hour, Stefan tries to find a place where he can buy some drinking water while Jakob stays there. Just a few minutes later, someone comes to the abandoned house and tells Jakob, that this place has been out of business for a couple of years as the whole building really needs to be restored (which the owner still has not started yet).



But he is again one of these particularly friendly Cook-Islanders and suggests Jakob to let him carry our two heavy bags to *Josie's Lodge*, a place not too far away where we might stay. When Stefan comes back with cold mineral water and two corns of ice cream, he sees this guy carrying our luggage on a motorbike which he finds pretty interesting. He did of course not know that this fellow carries our bags to another guest house. Fortunately, he does not take into considerations to beat this thief up.

Josie's Lodge looks very nice. It shows us that even without too much money, it is possible to create a fine atmosphere. Too bad that the house is built in a way that all the heat stays inside and is even stored during the whole night so that our bodies are extremely busy producing enough sweat. It is unbelievably hot and humid. Additionally we just cannot ignore the population of up to 8cm long cockroaches feeling like home in the kitchen. But anyway, we are on the Cook Islands and love this place.

Josie, an old Maori woman is very nice and again tremendously friendly. She tells us a lot of stories about the islands and her huge family (probably everyone on the Cook Islands is somehow related to her). But during her story-telling, our analytical minds frequently detect redundancies in her content structure. Clearly, living your whole life on a small island inhabited by no more than 2,500 Maoris creates a different communication style compared to Germany. "Do you know where the Island Night takes place?" – "Yeahhhhhhh, you know, when you get there, you'll know where it is."; "Does it rain often here on Aitutaki?" – "Yeahhhhh, sometimes it rains, but you know, sometimes, it doesn't." We are very amused instead of angry or confused.

When her daughter drops in, she brings us some interesting local fruits which are sticky but delicious. As it has no big pips, we can just eat the whole thing which is about as big as an apple. Again, we are stunned by this unbelievable friendliness. Coming from Germany, this just makes such a huge difference. It seems to us that everyone here does not see us as a tourist or customer but as a friend. Absolutely amazing...

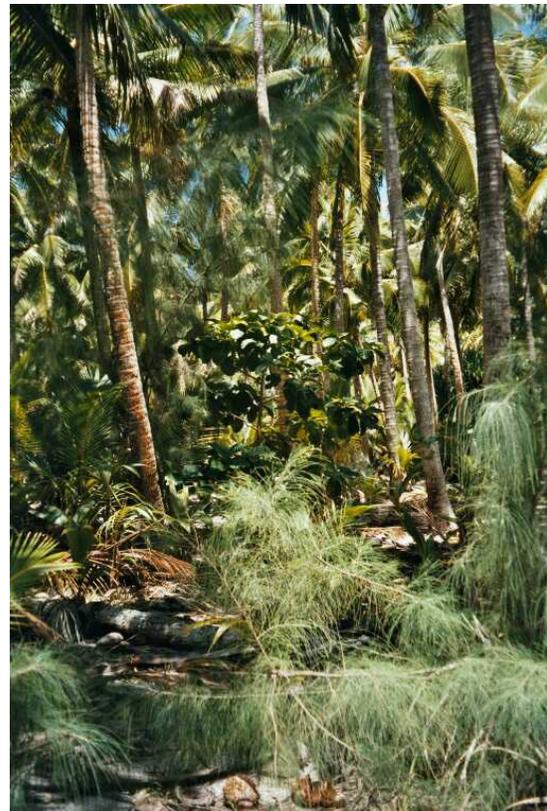
We take a little nap and eat some fruit toast. Later we go "downtown" and buy oats, coconut milk, bananas, doughnuts and ice cream served from a card board. The scoops are huge and tasty. Back at the lodge we cook some noodles as well as oats with coconut milk and water (breakfast for the next day). Stefan watches the local TV-program (*Star Trek Generations* and *College Kickboxer*) while Jakob studies some economics as he will have an exam a few weeks after this journey. The local TV is cut and produced by amateurs. Sometimes, they freeze the momentary image and talk about problems concerning the waste system on the island. You can see the play-logo (>) and LP/SP on the screen so that the actual entertainment is not the movies but the amateur-like way that things are broadcasted. We also realize that there are no copyrights on the Cooks since the movies are pirated VCDs from Indonesia with Chinese and Indonesian subtitles. We go to bed at half past ten.

26.02.02 – Around The Island

"Cock-a-doodle-doooooo!" Damn! It is half past five and we both wake up by the cries of about 50 different cocks. This concert lasts more than an hour and each cry lets our hatred increase exponentially. Full of ire we try to go on sleeping. What a pity that we do not have a shotgun! Finally we get up at half past ten.

We eat the breakfast we prepared the day before which tastes like nothing. But adding some jam and more bananas, it is alright and fills us. Afterwards, we wash some more clothes, write our diary and plan to hire two bikes. Let's go!

Five NZ\$ for a bike is okay – but they are too small and not in a good state. We cycle to the north, have a look at the small airport and go to the south later. We see a lot of different tropical trees and some beautiful landscapes.



In some places we do even see tropical conifers, the specific needle trees of this region. Together with all these coconut trees, it looks a little strange but great.

There are wild chickens everywhere running around on the island. In the northern part we want to drink a coconut but fail exorbitantly when trying to climb up and catch it. After a while we find a

palm low enough to reach the fruits by jumping. The green coconut can be opened very easily and is a very good drinking water supply.



Refreshed by an ice cream, we try to contact Tom and Vincent who are not present at their hotel. We leave them a message and continue cycling around until the evening. We are still fascinated by the lush vegetation. Some palm trees reach unbelievable heights. Impressing...

After sunset we go for a short swim and eat some doughnuts. In the evening, there is suddenly a power-breakdown on Aitutaki: all the lights go out and it is totally dark. Waiting for the power to come back, Josie tells us in the kitchen that most of the chickens living on the island are wild and can be slaughtered at will. We plan to make a chicken barbeque.

27.02.02 – Fast Chicken And Fast Rhythm

Again the bloody roosters! If they knew what we intend to do to them they would not cry that proudly. Each “cock-a-doodle-doo” drives our blood thirst. A fire of rage starts to burn in our veins: “Die, chicken, die!”

After breakfast we cycle to the south to meet Tom and Vincent, the large American guys. Again, we miss them but they left us a message that they are diving. Then we go to the *Air Rarotonga* office and book the flight to Atiu. Afterwards we cycle to the *Ministry of Marine Resources* where giant clams are raised and placed into the lagoon later. Too bad that the actual opening hours differ from the one's given by the guide book. We are lucky that there is a worker who shows us the baby clams. But as they only reach the size of no more than just a few millimeters, the whole thing is not too spectacular.

It is time to bring the bikes back and we have an ice cream once more. On our way back to the lodge, we meet the woman from the *Air Rarotonga* office who tells us that our flight has been canceled due to a lack of demand. That is annoying! We have to make new plans now. Thinking deeply, we go to town and have a hamburger and a milkshake at Josie's granddaughter's shop which tastes quite good. Suddenly, a white rental car appears with our American fellows inside and we make an appointment for the evening to meet at Blue Noon's island night. An island night is an evening event where the locals dressed in their traditional dancing clothes perform old Maori dances and offer local specialties.

Now it is time to take revenge for our disturbed nights and to hunt a chicken in the forest. Thus we hike up the hill and sharpen our senses. We soon find out that these damn birds are extremely shy. They just run or fly away when we get closer than 50 meters. We decide to construct a trap. As we know from the locals that the chicken's food is based on coconut, we take one of these fruits, open it and get out some of its flesh. We put it on the ground next to a bush where several chicken stay in concealment. We set a string fastened at a shrub around this meal. Now, we only need to pull the string as soon as a chicken approaches the food. Its feet would be fettered and we could easily cut off its head, bring it to the lagoon where we would remove its intestines (What kind of predators would all that blood attract?).

So, we are sitting around and wait... and wait... and wait...

Why don't these stupid birds just come out? Some of them leave their hiding place but they are not at all interested in our trap. After some time, we simply confess to us that our hunt has failed miserably. Frustrated and unsatisfied we go back to Josie's and prepare a salad.

At about eight o'clock we go to the island night. On our way, a lot of land crabs cross the road such that we need to be careful not to step on them. "Watch out, watch out, watch out, watch out, nooooooooooooo!" – CRUNCH. Jakob's warnings have come too late and he sees Stefan's foot coming down to accidentally end a crab's life. Still amused, we arrive at the island night's place.

There, we meet some local children who show us how to dance traditionally which is really difficult. Our trials to imitate them are nothing but embarrassing. You just have to go to school to learn it properly! On the other hand we teach them some German which also turns out to be very difficult for them.

The show is really stunning. A percussion group plays some extremely fast rhythm and three men and four women start dancing. Incredible, the women move nothing but their hip whereas the men shake their knees. With mouths wide open, we stare at the blurry something which once was a woman's hip... very sexy! They move so fast that our eyes cannot catch up. The same is true for the males' knees. Every male actor is part of a wonderful Polynesian choir singing proudly melodies in several harmonies in a very self-committed way. We both love this very much. We are also fascinated about the clothes they wear. By the way, we are positively surprised that the whole thing is not just made for tourists as the majority of the audience consists of Polynesian people who often cheer loudly and anyway, it doesn't cost a cent.

After this spectacular performance, everybody is asked to dance and it would be an insult not to do it. A very cute six years old local girl asks Stefan to go on the dance floor. A ten years old girl invites Jakob and we both try hard but ours' and the few other travelers' joints are not agile enough. Later, we make an appointment with the American dudes for the lagoon cruise the following day. It is bedtime now.

28.02.02 – The Lagoon-Cruise

After early breakfast we get picked up at half past nine for the lagoon cruise. Soon later, we enter a small but fast boat with six other tourists from Austria, Berlin, Australia, Denmark and England. At first they take us to a nice snorkeling place whose water depth reaches up to about five meters. We do not see as many corals and fishes as on Rarotonga but fishes here are accustomed to people and hence not too shy.



The most impressive animals are the giant clams: they look like petrified fossils, but when we touch their inner flesh with a stick, they contract extremely quickly which even makes a noise. These clams are about 100 years old and reach sizes up to 80 cm.

Our next destination is a small island where endemic birds breed their eggs. By the way, we have a great view on one of the further islands. 30 minutes later we find ourselves on Rapota which was formally used as a leper colony and was reused just a year ago as the setting for a British survival TV show called *Shipwrecked*. There are plenty of birds and chicken and tiny structures left by the TV-team.



Then we go to One-Foot-Island where we have lunch. Next to a fish-barbecue, they serve breadfruit-salad (tastes like potato), starfruit, melons, mango, bananas and some more local food. This is very delicious and fills us as we have never been filled before on the Cook Islands. Our Captain Wonderful reminds us all the time:



“Don’t look at me! Listen to me, listen to me! Concentrate on the food, eat, eat, eat everything you can! Don’t look at me! Don’t talk, just listen and eat and if you really feel like you have to say something: Only with a full mouth!”

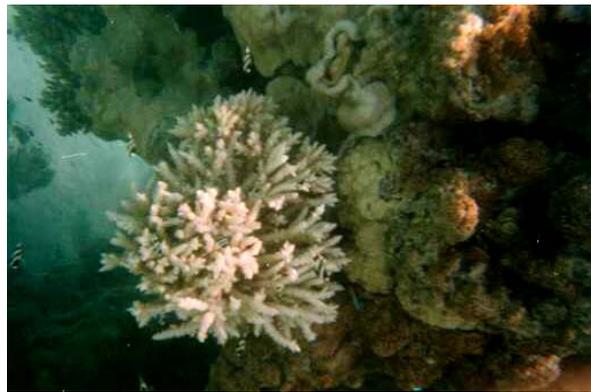
After the lunch, we are listening to interesting stories from the English-Danish couple who are on a ‘round-the-world-trip on their own plane. We also talk to the frighteningly fat Austrian human being who spends all his money to make trips like



this one twice or three times a year. Among our group, there is also this embarrassing man from Berlin who is not only unable to speak proper English but also gets on everyone's nerves by his pathetic comments. But he can't spoil the atmosphere created by these amazingly beautiful motus.



Afterwards we go snorkeling in the lagoon where we meet our American friends, Tom and Vincent, again. In the shallow water, they are looking for interesting shells by turning around rocks. At the end of our trip we see a huge swarm of fishes and Stefan watches a blue fish hunting them. All in all we enjoyed this cruise very much as we have seen such beautiful unpopulated islands which just gave us the impression to be on vacation in paradise.



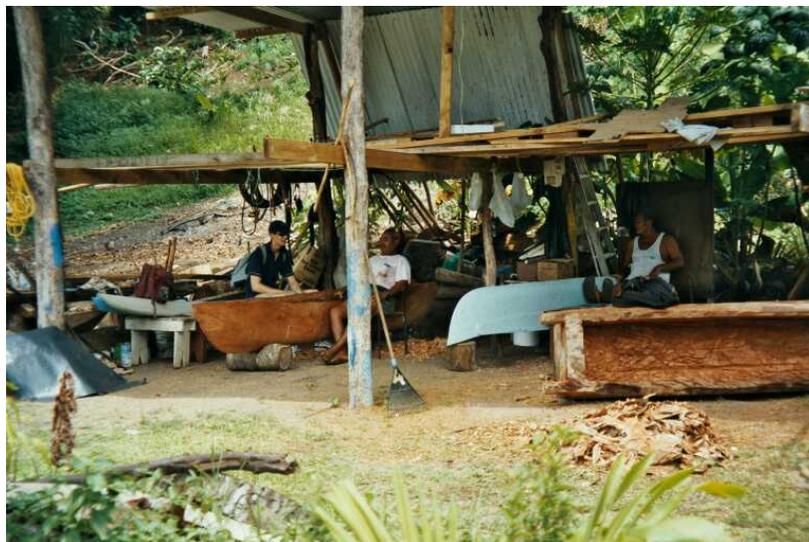
Coming back to the main island, Tom and Vincent give us a ride back to the lodge. On our way, we stop over at Wayne's place, the man from New Zealand who is building his own bungalow on Aitutaki. He tells us some incredible sailor stories (tiger sharks, shipwrecked, people dying, pirates) which are entertaining but maybe not all true.

We then go back, cook some potatoes with beans and have a chat with Gary, a new guest at Josie's from California. After he went to bed, we play cards with Littoria and David, two relatives of Josie. The girl has really dark skin and shows us that on the islands, people can still look very different even with only limited genetic material. After some games, it is bedtime again.

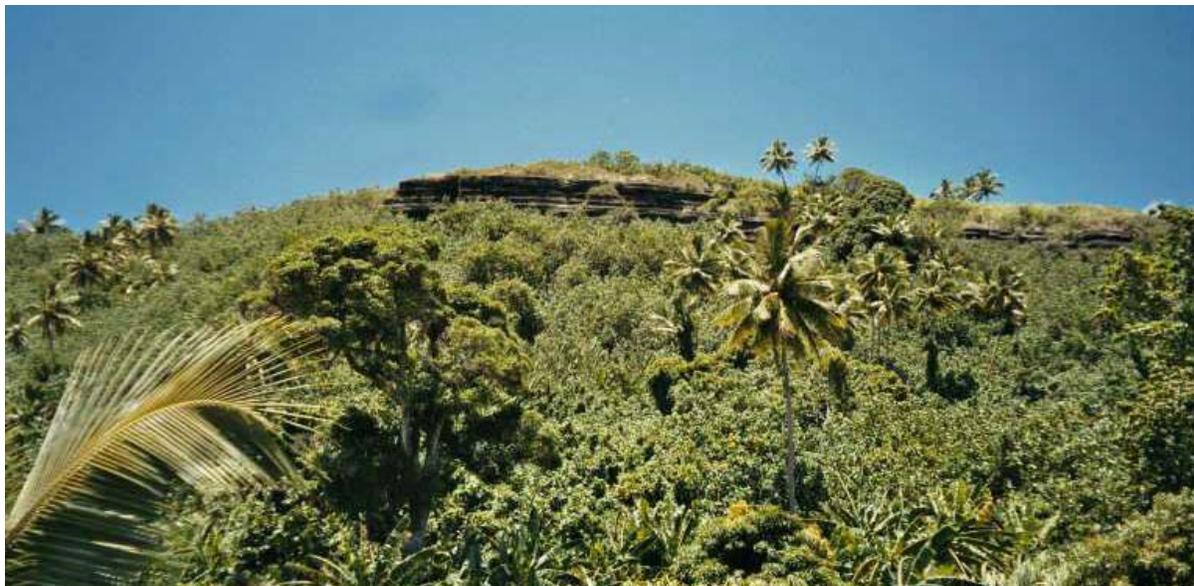
01.03.02 – The Big Sweating

After the usual bother from the cocks at five o'clock, we get up at half past eight and cook some milky oats with pineapple which turns out to be very tasty. We go to *Air Rarotonga* and buy tickets for the last two seats left for the flight to Rarotonga the following day. We cannot believe how lucky we are.

We have a little rest and start hiking up to the highest point of Aitutaki with Gary. This man seems to have some problems with the climate as he does already look quite pale before we even start. On our way we meet two local canoe makers who apparently have worked out a way to draw synergy between the consumption of alcohol, relaxing in the shadows and still maintaining productivity. We pay them a small visit and have a chat about the Cook Island canoes. They are amazingly friendly and tell us a lot about how they make these boats and that they only produce for the locals.



Later, our way brings us to a point where we can see the hill from below. Next to the street, there grow banana and mango trees. But most fascinating is the flame tree whose red flowers are used by the locals for ear decoration. This hill is only 164 meters high but it is so hot and humid that we feel like losing several kilos of weight just by sweating like bastards. But reaching the top we must admit it was really worth the exhausting torture: we have a superb panorama-view on the whole lagoon and the lush overgrown hills. It is unbelievable how many different kinds of vegetation we can see on this small island only. We take pictures in all directions and just enjoy the moment.





The way down is surprisingly fast though we need to have a little rest in the shadow of a coconut tree. Gained new strength from cookies and cold drinking water we feel strong enough for the foot walk back to our lodge. On the way we see a cricket game going on whose field has been extended over the road so that car and motorbike drivers must pay attention in order not to harm any players who are mostly running around for the ball without looking. But as almost the whole island's population is watching the game anyway, traffic is quite limited. We meet the large American dudes by chance and say good bye to them as we are about to leave the island.

Hey, today is Friday and people are getting drunk tonight. We decide to try the tumunu where people have lots of bush-beer. We walk "downtown", up the hill and pass the Church of Jesus Christ where Mormons worship the invisible man. There is a sports-festival going on and a lot of friendly people welcome us to take part. Stefan plays basketball, Jakob volleyball. Unfortunately, while Stefan is playing, there is a lot of friction going on in his shoes and his foot skin is loosening from his feet which might be caused by the humid climate or the fact that we did the hike today. Ahhh! That burns like hell. A very kind missionary from California gives him some tape.

Afterwards we finally try to find the *Rainforest*, the place where the bush beer or home brew or jungle juice is supposed to be sold. At this place we only see an old drunk man watching TV with his mouth opened. He staggers to the door and we immediately get the suspicion that all the home brew must be in his stomach as his bad breath nearly anaesthetizes us. He tells us that we are a few hours late so that there is nothing left.

Disappointed we walk to *Fletchers*, a night club in the area. On our way we accompany a 15-year old half-cast (Cook-Kiwi mix) who tells us about her boyfriend and Stefan teases her a bit. As *Fletchers* is nearly empty, we go immediately back to the lodge and go to sleep.

02.03.02 – Motorbike: Learning By Doing!

We get up rather early, pack our stuff and say good bye to Josie. She really is a nice woman and we therefore decide to take a picture with her. She refuses to let Jakob on the picture without wearing the flame-tree flower ear decoration. For a last time we look at her nice but sometimes hot place including her husband's grave.



At half past seven we try to hitchhike to the airport since the bus is very expensive (8 NZ\$ each). As no one takes us with him we are forced to take this bus. The airport is cute and tiny, maybe about as big as a German bus-station. There we can also see the small plane of the Swiss couple.

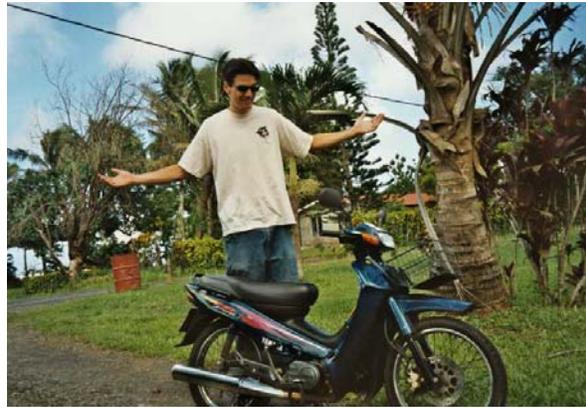


Entering the small jet we are very happy that our seats are both located at the aisle and window since there are only two rows of seats in the plane. Slightly surprised we recognize that there are three puking-bags provided for this 40-minutes-flight. The only stewardess (damn, she is HOT!) on board tells Stefan that the airport on Mangaia had been closed by putting bulldozers on the airstrip as people there are afraid to get the dengue-fever from Rarotonga. Fortunately, it has been cleared by now. Because of too many clouds, it is not worth taking a picture out of the window.

Back in Rarotonga, we leave our luggage at the airport and go to “town” where we gather information about island-hopping and buy some pharmaceutical products such as sun protection. As we intend to hire a motorbike, Stefan obtains his driving license for ten NZ\$ at the police office pretending that his European license is also valid for these bikes. This is quite funny as we can discuss in German our plans in front of the policemen that Jakob will also drive the bike without a license as he needs to pass a practical test on Monday first. By the way, everybody drives left on the Cook Islands. But that doesn’t really matter since traffic is very low and there is only one main road around the island without any crossroads.

We then rent the vehicle and push it to a place where nobody sees us. Mmh, so many buttons and levels... might be interesting to know what they are all for. Five minutes later, we feel save enough

to drive to *Vara's* where we both get a bed in the dorm. We ask in the office if anyone could pick up our luggage from the airport which they agree to do even though they admit that their driver might still be drunk from the night before (right now, it is about one o'clock in the afternoon!) so that he probably will not bring our luggage too soon.



Then we ride to Piri's where we had forgotten some stuff before we left for Aitutaki. This time we can drive up to 80 km/h, but as we have no insurance yet, we decide to slow down. As we could have anticipated, everything is at exactly the same place where we put it. Good to know that you can easily trust the Cook Islands Maoris who would have never stolen anything. Just to note: this is so much different from Cameroon.

Back at *Vara's* we are told that *Raro-Tours* has picked up our backpacks and brought them. How strange that we cannot see them anywhere. After several phone-calls we decide to drive to the airport to get our luggage on our own. Luckily, our backpacks are still there.

As we have one motorbike, we intend that one of us takes the luggage on the bus while the other one goes back to the lodge by bike. Due to our bus schedule, the next vehicle will arrive in a little while. After the bus still hasn't shown up for an hour we decide to change our plans. It is the first time we drive a motorbike and now we have to carry two heavy bags and ourselves. After 40 minutes of difficult balancing we arrive exhausted at *Vara's*. On our last few meters, already inside the hostel's compound, we finally lose balance in the gravel and fall off. But we are both alright.

We cook basmati-rice with curry beef and talk with some backpackers. At about half past ten, Stefan drives to *TJ's* to go dancing and flirting while Jakob prefers to read some more about economics since he doesn't like Hip Hop music at all. At the club, Stefan meets Anita Savage, a small and cute girl from the shop next to *Vara's*, the female cop from the police station and the stewardess he has flirted with a little bit on the air plane. As the latter's boyfriend (or husband) stands next to her during the whole evening, he finds it inappropriate to ask her for a dance. *TJ's* closes already at 12am and Stefan hence rides back home. In the darkness he misses *Vara's* and gets a little lost. Some time later, he finds all the backpackers sleeping (It is 0:30am) and goes to bed as well.

03.03.02 – Sunday Conversations And Fruits Of Rarotonga

We get up quite late, read a lot and eat some boiled and fried potatoes. In the afternoon, we go snorkeling at Fruits of Rarotonga, a Raori, a place where fishing is prohibited. We see some corals and some big fishes out of which some are busy eating the corps of another species. But all in all it

is not as spectacular as some other places (Piri's with his lagoon and gap in the coral reef, as well as Avarua Harbor). Approaching the reef, some fishes start following us and a small blue striped one eats the scab of a wound on Stefan's leg. This is one of the reasons why we go out of the water rather soon.



In the evening we have a nice conversation with Lorena, a mature woman from England who works for human rights all over the world, and Monisha, an American girl with Indian heritage. We eat some noodles and a whole pot of rice with corned beef and spicy sauce. This really stuffs our stomach. Two hours later, we write loads of postcards. We talk to an American guy from Texas and another American who has already been to Gengenbach and China. With a female Anthropology student from Stanford, Stefan argues about the HP-Compaq merger whereas he gets the impression that she is only pro because Carly Fiorina is a female CEO. With Jakob, she talks about different human races in the world. Not too late, we go to bed (11pm).

04.03.02 – Toxic Waste And Big Sub Sandwich

We lazy butts sleep longer than ten hours and get up at half past ten. Oh yeah! We have a washing machine! Finally, we can take care of our toxic waste (laundry) which we have put into a plastic bag in order not to contaminate our "clean" clothes with that mutated fungus. But this actually worsened the clothes biohazard level and probably made it even radioactive! Urgh, we are close to vomiting... so disgusting! Waiting for the sterilization to be completed, we write the last postcards.

Ahh, that smells good. We hang our clean and nice rope on the washing line and go to town to book our flight to Atiu. Unfortunately they cannot book it yet as they have to check accommodation on

that island first. We change Stefan's last traveler checks and buy some food at the supermarket. Stefan meets Anita again and makes an appointment for Sunday (she did not want to go out before that day).

After bringing all the food to the refrigerator in the hostel we go to an internet café to check some addresses and our email. This place is the cheapest one with 26 cents a minute (!).

Back at the hostel, we try to prepare the longest sandwich we have ever eaten. Each of us takes an 80 centimeters long baguette split into two halves. We put on eggs, cheese, cucumbers, cottage cheese, jam and peanut butter. Eating that turns out to be tasty but challenging - but we succeed and raise the attention of other guests in the hostel who have never seen such a long subway before. They even take pictures to show to their grandchildren later...



We go down to the beach with two Swedish girls and watch the stars. From time to time we see bright shooting stars falling from the sky. One of the best night skies ever as even the Milky Way is clearly visible. The longer we look up, the more stars we see.

In the evening we drive to *RSA*, a night club opposite the airport. Unfortunately they don't play local music at all except for very few songs from Fiji. It is also rarely visited by locals (10%). When the Fijian percussion rhythm is played, a local girl comes and dances in a traditional way with us. Among the tourists there are Lorena and Monisha who join us to dance. At the end, Stefan dances with five Cook-girls and has a lot of fun with them (ass shaking).

At twelve o'clock the disco shuts and we go back to *Vara's*. There we meet Monisha again and walk along the beach with her. She is quite a fascinating woman as she looks like 23 with an age of 31 and is extremely well educated, not arrogant at all and interested in our view of life. We talk with her until three o'clock and fall to bed.

05.03.02 – BBQ And Good Bye

We get up at half past seven and go to the market soon to buy some nice fresh fish for a lunch barbecue. As we can only find some barracuda, we go to the supermarket and buy fresh swordfish. After we sent our postcards, Jakob passes his driving-test. Whew that was so difficult: After the police officer comes, Jakob actually has to drive around the block, show that he knows how to use the blinker when turning left and that he respects Stop signs.

Back at *Vara's*, we prepare the barbecue and while Stefan practices being a gentleman by giving Monisha a ride to the hostel's office, he picks up three breadfruits. As we peel these vegetables, white fluid comes out of their interior and makes our hands extremely sticky. We boil the breadfruit and some potatoes and heat fat with garlic. We put the fish and the vegetables both marinated by the garlic-fat on the barbeque. It's a terrific lunch even though we probably did not prepare the breadfruit in a right way as it tastes a little strange.



Later, Lorena and Monisha leave towards Aitutaki and we snorkel around at the Avarua harbor. The current is very strong so that we don't dare to swim out too far. We dive very deep and watch the sun under water. In the evening we are extremely tired and - in a state between alive and coma - we just reach our beds and fall into deep-sleep after less than half a minute.

06.03.02 – Business And Snorkeling

While Jakob stays at *Vara's* and studies some economics, Stefan tries to form business relationships with his small internet company. He does not want to build up a new branch here which anyway would not be possible as the government protects the economy to secure local involvement. He finds a web agency called *Summerfield Services* which offers the same product portfolio as his company *Web4eye.com*. There, he finds out that the way of thinking on the Cooks concerning eCommerce is 25 years behind the time and that the locals are not willing to spend enough money for homepages so that web services would be an unprofitable business. Anyway, Stefan and the manager exchange contact addresses to talk about a partnership later. Stefan returns the bike and takes the bus back to *Vara's*.

After a lot of sandwiches we go snorkeling. This time, we swim to Ta'akoka, the most southern motu at Muri Beach. The water is shallow but we see fishes, crabs and even a moray. We take off one of our flippers and tease it a bit. It immediately gets aggressive and bites into the plastic several times. Jakob goes on the islet where he sees big crabs, rats running around the trees, some birds and lizards.

Three hours later we arrive at the hostel again. So much food on the free shelf makes us really happy. On this shelf you find on the one hand food which backpackers leave behind as they don't want to carry it around anymore and on the other hand things the cleaning ladies find unlabeled. We eat lots of *Wheat-Bix* with milk – it's the first time for Stefan to enjoy this British delicacy.

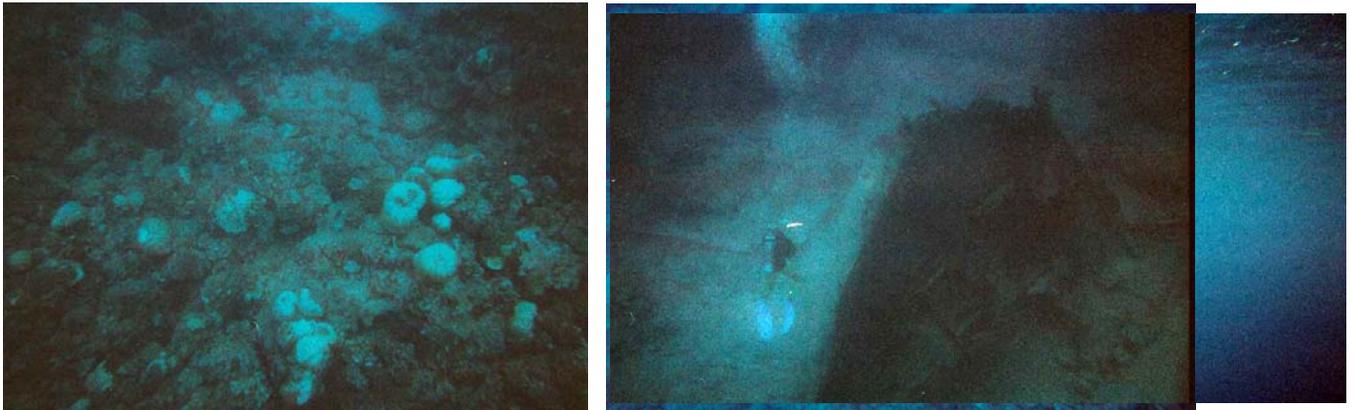
Right now, we are sitting in the kitchen. By the way, writing postcards is one of the most boring things to do on vacation but nothing compared to the boredom caused by writing a diary (especially when being some days behind). Uhhh, what a pleasure and satisfaction – we are up to date!

In the evening we prepare some fried noodles with onions, leek-onions and soy sauce. Well filled we play *Uno* with some English natives. Later we try to sleep but people are still noisy so that we remain awake for hours.

07.03.02 – The New World

We get up at half past nine and have toast for breakfast. After reading a while we go to *Dive Rarotonga* for scuba diving and snorkeling. After we waited and talked a little with the local firefighter captain from New Zealand who runs the business, we go to Avarua harbor. On the way we pick up a doctor from Yugoslavia and the dive-master.

We enter a small boat, pass the barrier reef and throw the anchor at a wrecks site. Incredible, visibility is 50 meters and you can see everything 30 meters down the ground. This is very different from what Stefan saw in German lakes where he was happy when he could see his own hand. Reaching the ground, Stefan's underwater camera refuses to work which is a shame as the landscape down here is something we have never seen before and absolutely beautiful. There are cities consisting of mushroom-like coral-cottages populated by different colorful fishes. At the shipwreck, Stefan sees two 30cm lion fishes. You should not only be cautious because of their dragon-like shape but also because of the poison causing pain for several days when injected by its spikes.



We also see starfishes with 15-20 legs which are poisonous as well. The doctor kills them all with his oxygen-bottle as they eat the living coral. After 45 minutes and only 0.35 bar left, Stefan goes to the surface where he meets Jakob who has been following the group snorkeling. He on the other hand could profit from the earlier snorkeling trips as his lung now allows him surprisingly deep dives. This trip was the best underwater-experience we both ever had and was really worth it.

We drive back to the diving base on the back of the pick-up and return to *Vara's* after a hot chocolate the firefighter prepared for us. There we have our daily push-up outside during a tropical downpour and break our records. Man, that is refreshing. Soon later we cook some noodles and read.

In the evening we play *Uno* with some English fellows (the blond nurse is by far the best looking girl at *Vara's*). Then we go to *Staircase* to do some more dancing. On the way in the bus we look how long we can meanwhile hold our breath. We take a deep breath and totally relax our body. It is weird because at the beginning, we don't even feel like holding our breath but rather hear our very

slow heart beat. In the end Stefan holds his breath for two minutes and 45 seconds. Absolutely stunning...

In the club, we meet the doctor from Yugoslavia again. He tells us entertaining stories such as: "You know... I never met a tourist-girl which didn't want to get laid. It is just a question of approach! I catch a tourist from time to time... the local girls have a problem with their attitude. You can't get rid of them and that causes trouble. And I don't like trouble." This guy is really funny and absolutely the opposite of what you imagine when you think about a doctor.

After some dancing we take *Vara's* bus back home without paying (everyone, including us, forgot about that). While Jakob goes to bed, Stefan finishes Kevin Kelly's book, *New Rules for the New Economy*, and listens to stories about a fight that took place at the nightclub just after we left.

08.03.02 – Motus And Heavy Downpour

During the whole night and day, it is raining and storming outside as we have never seen it before. Nevertheless we swim to Koromiri, one of Rarotonga's motus. There we leave our snorkeling gear and start our motu discovery. On this island we find several small trails and cottages probably made for weddings. It is not too much overgrown and it is easy to reach the northern side quickly.



It soon starts to rain and storm even more heavily. Even though this is quite chilly, we continue to the next motu called Oneroa. There we find lush tropical vegetation and hence many beautiful trees and plants. We start walking crossover and lose a bit orientation in the middle of this jungle. Fortunately, this island is too small to really get lost.



The third and last motu we visit is Motutapu which looks completely different. The beach is rocky and the interior is full of bush and huge palms. It is absolutely impossible to get to the islands interior. We are both fascinated how different all Rarotonga's motus are even though they are quite close to each other and rather small.

Meanwhile it became so stormy that each raindrop hurts a lot. We walk back on the east side of Motutapu and watch the big waves crushing against the reef. Between the islands, the water is warm and spends us heat. Due to the huge and hard raindrops, we snorkel back to the beach rather than walking in the shallow water to reduce pain. After two hours we are very happy to be back at the hostel.

Later we cook rice and mince meat, play *Asshole*, a card game, with two Canadian girls, drink Raro- and Cook Islands Lager and take the bus to *Staircase*. Unfortunately, this place and *TJ's* are nearly empty, so that we go to *Trader Jack's*, a pub where we meet five English girls. They play a drinking game but as we don't want to consume any more alcohol they propose us to flash our body when losing, which happens one time each. The girls' reflexes are already pretty weakened due to

the strong influence of alcohol which makes them lose and drink even more. They all look very good by the way so that we suggest to them to join us for *Staircase*. Later, they even show up but we have to leave soon to get the last bus. We give them Piri's number in order to do the cross island trek together with two of them in a couple of days. Very tired, we go to bed.

09.03.02 – Cave Exploration On Atiu



We get up early, pack our stuff and go to the airport. On our way to the *CITC* supermarket to buy some food before leaving, we get very wet. At the airport, we enter a very small plane whose aisle is not wider than 20 cm. We are both sitting in the first row so that we can see and observe the pilots and the cockpit. What a pity that there is no stewardess on board. The flight is extremely loud but smooth. Too bad that the photos we took of the outside don't come out well.



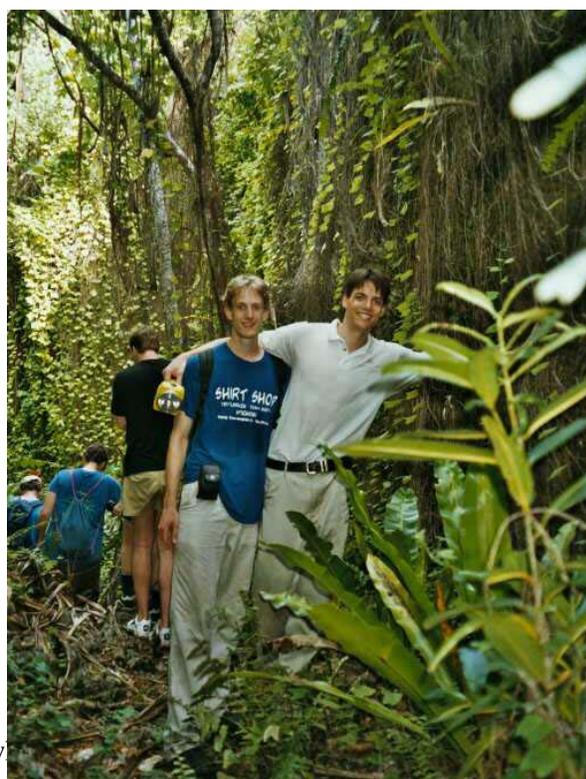
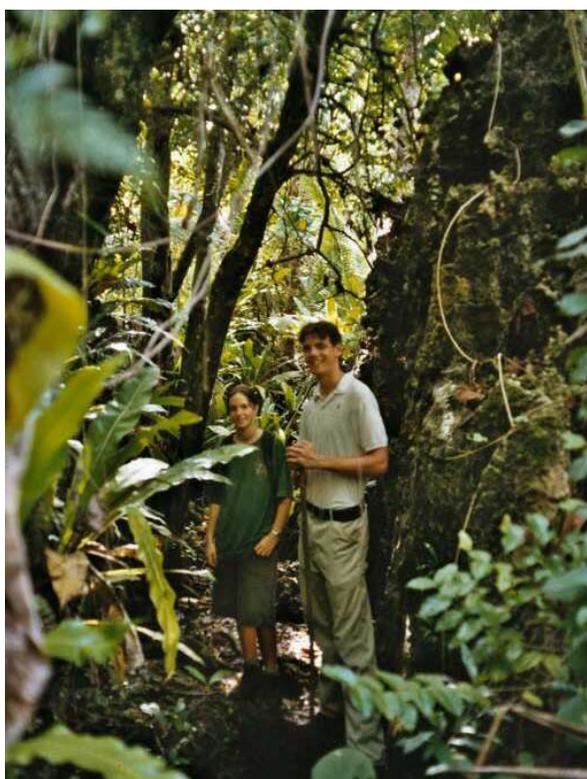
Andrea, a German woman who runs one of the two guesthouses on the island, picks us up at the airport and greets us with the traditional huge flower-necklaces called *Eis*. They look nice but are quite heavy and rough. Together with a Swedish couple we have met by chance in the *Staircase* the night before, we drive to the *Are Manuiri Guesthouse*. On our way, Andrea shows us the harbor and some other places. The guesthouse is very nice and the inner and outer architecture shows very much commitment of the guesthouse owners. We book the cave tour for



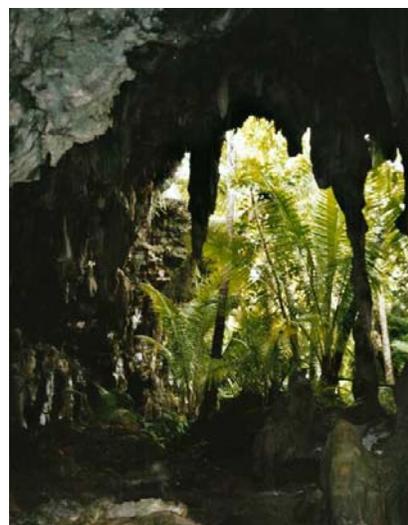
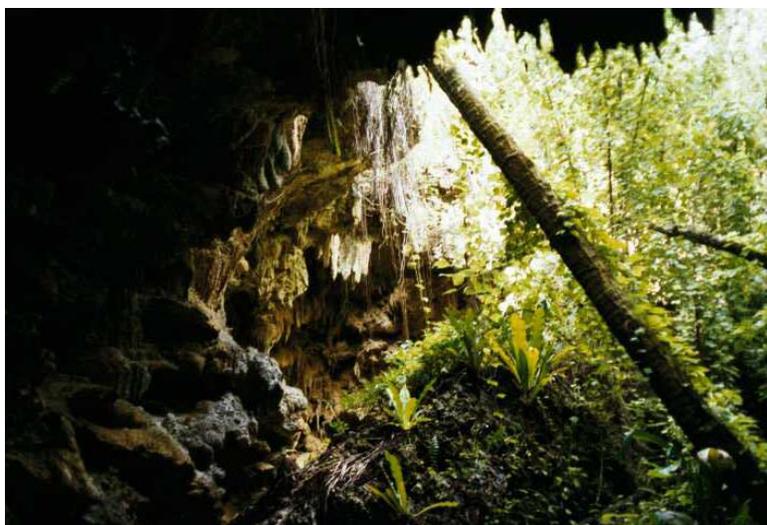
today and the island tour for tomorrow with *Atiu Tours*.

At three o'clock, a pickup arrives and James, Sarah and their father, who form the *Aitu Tours* team, bring us to the *Makatea*, the raised coral reef which surrounds the island. Too bad that an English family with two children joins us for the little ones do not know how to behave and complain all the time about everything. Their parents cannot say "no". We just wish we had some tear gas.





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rocky, is totally overgrown by many beautiful plants and trees. After 40 minutes walk (would have



been 20 minutes without the kids) we reach the entrance of the cave which we would have never ever found by ourselves since the extremely small hole is well hidden in the jungle. The surface is extremely slippery so that we have to be careful during the whole trip. The formations are very interesting and mysterious. Switching off our flashlights, it is totally dark inside and so quiet, that we can even hear our heartbeat. It's almost frightening...

After a while in another cave, just situated next to the first one, we hear the clicking sounds of the practically blind Kopeka birds. These sounds serve them for orientation in these dark places, similar to the bat's method. Soon later we can even see those extremely rare animals whose population of about 200 is located only in this cave. We see about 20 of this species and are awed by the fact that we have seen ten percent of the world population.



We then enter the third and last cave on this tour where there is a small natural pool. We take off our clothes and jump into this clear and cold water. Now we can take advantage of our improved lungs as we go down a bit. Stefan sees a hole which leads to an underwater cave and he dives in. What an adrenalin flash as he does not see a water surface and therefore does not know if he is going to be able to breathe again, but fortunately he comes up at the other side of the pool. On the way to the surface, it is so tight that he has to be careful not to scratch himself or bump his head against the limestone. Additionally the candle's light is reflected by the water's surface so that we all need waterproofed flashlights to see something. What an underwater experience!

We walk back to the pickup which takes us to the tumunu beer school in the middle of the rainforest. In front of a small cottage we see five locals sitting in a circle on stumps while getting drunk. They welcome us to join them drinking the jungle juice, the long forbidden home brew. These men are all nice guys and we have really funny conversations about topics like the Cook Islands snow problems in June.

The juice tastes very good though it has nothing to do with beer and is served in a coconut cup. It is an important rule that you always swallow the coconut's content at once and that only the "chairman" is authorized to fill it and to pass it on. It is seven o'clock and the guys tell us, that they

have already started at four. This gives us an impression of how drunk these men must be. They tell us that they do this every day and that there are five more tumunus on this island somewhere. Half an hour later, one of the guys decides to go home. He is so drunk, that he has problems walking to his age-old car. But he is obviously used to driving on Atiu's unlighted roads and anyway, he is probably the only one driving a car on this island right now. After 45 minutes and fifteen rounds of bush-beer, *Atiu Tours* arrive to pick us up although the drinking is not finished yet. They say that the Maoris will become very unpleasant what we don't believe since they were still nice even though already completely drunk.

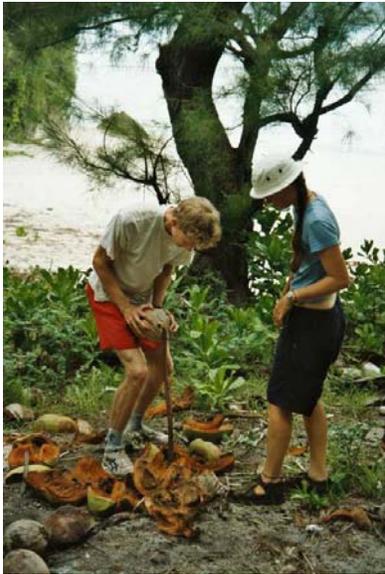
Back at the hostel, we eat some cooked and fried potatoes with beans. At eight o'clock, James and Sarah, who by the way are fourteen and sixteen years old, come over and we go to the *Arcade Youth Club* where we play a couple of games of pool. The Cook Islanders are no good players (compared to England) but far better than us (which of course is only because we are slightly drunk...). We invite James and Sarah for a cup of ice cream and meet some of their friends later. They are very interested in learning some rude expressions in German while they teach us some Maori slang. At around eleven o'clock, we go home.

10.03.02 – The Big Tour

Like in Aitutaki, the roosters wake us up at five o'clock. Thank you very much – appreciate it! Later, Sarah, James and their father come over to give us a ride to the church. Everyone there wears his best suit so that we are a little bit embarrassed feeling underdressed. The whole worshipping is held in Cook Islands-Maori and Sarah and James tell us that the preacher especially mentioned us as welcomed guests.

It is very nice to listen to the traditional choir songs. Most of the visitors sing clearly and loudly in a multipart Polynesian harmony which sounds very good. The rest of the service is about as boring as in a German church but the fantastic songs were really worth going there. After church we cook some coconut cream rice not only for us but also for the Swedish couple that was obviously not very well prepared since you don't have always easy access to food on that island.

With that amount of energy we start the island tour with Sarah and her father. The pickup brings us to very interesting sites where there are leftovers of traditional ruins. The island has three wings: the Captain Cook landing, the three grottos and the sink holes. We stop by at a beach where we collect some beautiful shells and have a nice lunch, where we open several coconuts. We also have muffins, papaya, banana, passion fruits and *Milo* (chocolate drink). Well filled, we go snorkeling.



When Stefan swims forwards he holds himself under water and observes the crashed waves coming over him. After a while he is surrounded by a swarm of 200 various colorful coral-fishes. But the currents are very strong and we are strongly advised not to swim out to the reef as we could be sucked out to the open sea. Thus we go back to the picnic and have some more delicious food.



After this nice break we visit other sites like the three grottos and the sinkholes. The latter are very interesting because they are the openings of tunnels which lead from the beach outside the barrier reef. The father tells us that there are very strong currents sucking everything outside the reef which falls into the hole. And to make it perfect, there are sharks waiting for you in the tunnel. We are brought to our place and visit James and Sarah later at their house.

We play *Emperor and Scum* (=Asshole) and *Perfect 10*. They have been so kind to save us the rest of the lunch and some buttered and cheesed biscuits. What a nice family! By the way Stefan loses every game! During the evening, we notice, that our fellows have quite a funny accent pronouncing certain words like “it depeeeeeends” or “seeeeeeeven”. We also find out interesting aspects about their father’s education. Even though he is very nice to us, he is very strict to his children forbidding for example that they listen to certain kinds of modern music. And by the way, mom is not there because she is giving missionary lesson somewhere in the world. When we are brought back by them, James needs a flashlight to see the road as the light of his motorbike is broken. But that’s no problem on an island without traffic. We go to bed tired.

11.03.02 – Snorkeling And Crab Hunt

We wake up at ten o’clock and walk to one of the three grottos for snorkeling with the Swedish couple. On our way we pick and eat a mango each and sweat very much. We are glad that it rains as we are consequently not bothered by mosquitoes. The coral reef is so sharp that we need shoes to climb down. A crab is in the Swedish woman’s way and she is very afraid of it. So it is time for us to save her and at the same time, we seize the opportunity to catch that little bastard with a plastic bag and a snorkel for our dinner later.





Down at the beach, we walk on a white hard ground which is covered by corals and sea urchins. Then, there are holes in the ground which lead to a tunnel under water which leads to a very small cave in the *Makatea*. This grotto is crowded by many young and colorful fishes. We also see a huge red-white striped cancer. The tunnel is about fifteen meters long and we all dive through. Again, it is so tight that we cannot swim but have to pull ourselves forwards. Leaving the tunnel, Stefan cuts his legs and Jakob his hand. But it was absolutely worth it as swarms of fishes awaited us in the

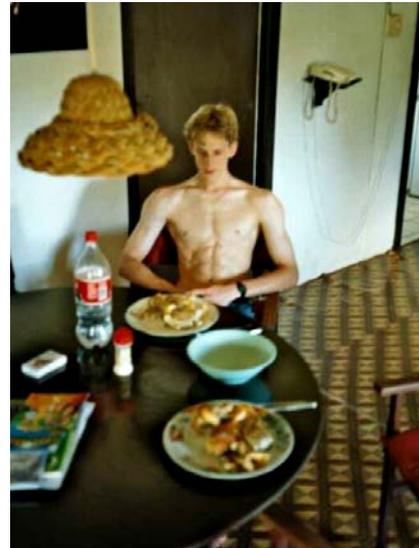
tunnel and it was really beautiful to see how the light comes through the small holes at the top into the dark cave. At a different place close to the grotto, Stefan sees another moray.



Afterwards, the Swedish couple goes back whereas we walk along the reef in order to hunt some more crabs. This is not too easy as these animals can run very quickly. But we collect four more crabs and are proud to be able to bring home food from the wilderness.

Walking back is a bit exhausting for Stefan as he carries the backpack and we both sweat a lot. On the way home, we meet local children and ask them how to prepare the crabs we just collected. They tell us that they don't really know it but suppose that you boil them like coconut crabs. After

that, we meet a woman who recommends us to put the living crabs into boiling water and wait about five minutes until they turn red. Back at the guest house we wash some clothes and put the crabs into a bucket with salt water which will be the crabs' last opportunity to relax before going to hell.



Later we boil some water in a pot and throw the crabs in there. We are pretty surprised that some of them still move their feet in the boiling water for several seconds. What a funny spectacle! Consuming them, we admit that they are eatable but not too delicious and not easy to open. As we are not filled properly, we eat some toast after two and a half crabs each.

At eight o'clock, Sarah and James visit us to play another *Perfect 10* game. By the way these brothers and sisters are really good looking: James is a handsome man and Sarah has shiny eyes in her beautiful and cute face. It is funny that they look so totally different for James' skin is about as dark as a mulatto one's and Sarah could nearly be a European girl even though only their mother is a Cook Islands-Maori. In contrast to last time, Stefan is the big winner this time. We say good bye to our local friends and go to bed immediately as we are both surprisingly tired and too weak for the daily push-up session.

12.03.02 – The Big Disaster

During this night, we both cannot sleep properly and Jakob wakes up at about two o'clock in the morning. He doesn't feel good as his mouth and throat are totally dried out. He tries to stand up in order to get some water in the bathroom but after only one or two steps, he suddenly loses consciousness and collapses. At the same time, he smashes his head in a big way against the frame of the door and finds himself lying on the floor. Shit, that hurts like hell! It takes a few minutes until he is able to see something again. This hit causes a wound above his left eye. Looking where he is just lying, he realizes that it was probably better to break his fall with his head against the door frame instead of the wooden table that was just half a meter away. But he is too dazzled to really appreciate that at this moment.

He slowly crawls to the bathroom where he wants to drink something which is not too easy as his dry mouth makes it difficult to swallow something. Back in his bed, he tries to have a look at his

watch but he cannot recognize how late it is as everything looks hazy to him. He lies down and waits for the sunrise to come.

A few hours later, we want to get up but we both cannot stand up without having a black curtain in front of our eyes. When Stefan gets up to stagger to the bathroom he has to stop short when this black wall appears in front of his eyes as well. We are both very worried now: We are on an island populated by only about 500 people somewhere in the middle of the South Pacific and our state makes it nearly impossible for us to do anything.

At 9:45, Andrea comes over and tells us that we have to be at the airport at eleven o'clock as the two flights to Rarotonga have been brought forward to twelve o'clock. Too bad, that nobody has informed us earlier. With a too low blood pressure, we pack our stuff and have to make breaks all the time to prevent us from passing out. What a torture! The Swedish couple and Andrea fortunately help us with our bags.

On the way to the airport, Stefan lies in the uncomfortable back of the pickup whereas Jakob sits in the front. But this is not much better as the upright position forces him to concentrate the whole time not to lose consciousness again. Andrea stops at a shop where she buys some pills for us which are something like *Paracetamol* served from a brown paper bag. By the way she is quite sure that we are both infected by dengue-fever. She tells us that it is not dangerous but lasts about two weeks.

At the airport, we check in (the Swedish couple does it for us, as we are pretty much lying around somewhere) and get informed that the ground crew has decided five minutes ago to have a second flight at two o'clock – our flight. Shit! We go back to the guesthouse again. We feel really bad now. We lie down and take these pills which unfortunately don't work at all.

At 13:45 we go back to the airport and wait for the plane. When we are told to enter the arrived plane, Stefan gets up too fast and needs to have some grip at a column but finally passes out for the first time. He has a weird dream and finds himself on the ground surrounded by other people in the airport amazed about what just happened. For him, it is really strange as he wakes up with no idea where he is and what he is doing. Slowly, he realizes that he is in the middle of the world on an island without a proper doctor.

We then slowly walk to the plane. We have to lay down all the three or four meters and the sun is burning. We sit down on the first seats. Two minutes later, the ugly English family enters the plane and wants us to make place for their misbehaving children as they have reserved those seats. We don't answer and ignore them lying around with our eyes and mouth half open making unhealthy noises. Stefan hears one of the kids crying which makes him feel a little better, at least emotionally. He tries to move his face muscles in order to form a smile but fails miserably. Finally, the family gives up and the plane takes off.

By the way, the other local passengers help us in an extremely friendly way by carrying our bags and giving us support while walking. One of the passengers, who just had a look at our faces, immediately gives us his three puking-bags so that we now have nine together. This will hopefully suffice.

The captain is so kind to demand an ambulance at the Rarotongan airport. This flight is the worst we have ever had. We cannot lie down and no seat position is comfortable in this extremely loud plane. We move the whole time and our whole body, especially our back, hurts. And as we cannot move into a horizontal position, we continuously find ourselves in a state between conscious and

unconscious. Fortunately, this state makes thinking hardly possible and prevents us from worrying about what kind of disease we caught and whether we will survive it easily.

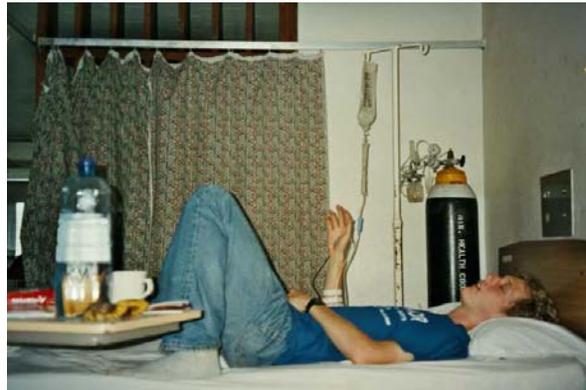
Arrived at the airport, two golf-buggies pick us up and bring us to the ambulance. Again, the locals help and encourage us. Meanwhile, there is no doubt for us anymore that the Cook Islands Maoris are by far the friendliest people we ever got to know. Their kindness will never be forgotten!

While we are driven in the ambulance car, the woman on the front seat asks us all the time if we are still alright. This way she probably wants to make sure that we are still conscious. At the hospital, two guys in medical uniform move us in wheelchairs to the emergency room. There they measure our blood pressure and pulse as well as our body temperature several times.

Then they tell us the results of the analysis of our blood: no dengue-fever! After a long consultation, the doctors conclude that we suffer from a heavy allergic reaction on the crabs we ate the day before. They give us an infusion and try to bring us to the ward. But when they put Stefan into a wheelchair, the black curtain appears and he passes out again. They give him an oxygen-mask immediately and put him back on the bed. After a short dream, Stefan finds himself in his bed again and wonders why everybody is so excited. "Ah, I think I lost my consciousness".

So they move us to the ward on our beds as we are obviously too weak for the wheelchair. We don't remember any point of our life where we had such little control over our bodies. We are "impressed" about how bad our state became. Before we leave the emergency room, we see the doctor from Yugoslavia: "What happened to you?" – "Aeehhh... nothing, just wanted to see you again."

Right now we are lying in our beds and have some sweet coffee with cookies that one of the nice nurses brought us even though dinner is actually over. We both obtained more than two and a half liters of infusion and feel better already.



Yeah, Stefan just wrote the diary until today. This is one of the positive things today because we would probably still be several days behind if we had not been admitted to the hospital. Unfortunately, Jakob has still problems with his eye coordination and cannot read anything. We just hope to be able to leave the hospital by tomorrow. This is not a nice experience that we are making but we hope that it adds value to our personality. Life isn't always *Disney Land!*

Later, a nurse calls Piri to tell him that we are in the hospital and hence will not come tonight. This nice guy immediately asks if we would like to have some food or something to drink. And in the evening, the Coconut King visits us together with a female German doctor called Ulrike who stays at his place and they bring us some bananas, apples, cookies and juice. Food! Stefan is so hungry!



We are simply stunned by Piri's immediate willingness to look for his guests. There is probably no other place in the entire world where this would be considered as self-evident. As Piri was born on Atiu, he is very interested in what has happened to us there and he tells us that it is probably not the crabs themselves which are so poisonous but the food these animals eat at a certain side of the island. As the plane from Auckland arrives, Piri has to pick up his new guests and therefore has to leave.

Later, we have a nice conversation with a nurse and she even offers us to take us out to join her deep sea fishing (as long as her partner agrees). Stefan feels better now whereas Jakob still has problems with his eyes and heavy cramps in his stomach. But by now we are already strong enough to sit in a wheelchair in order to be pushed to the toilet. We are very grateful for this newly gained level of dignity and independence...

By the way, there are also rather big bubbles in Jakob's infusion cable getting closer and closer to his lower arm. The nurses just shake the cable till they get up again. When Jakob asks one of the nurses about what could happen if one of those bubbles reached his blood, she explains that this could cause immediate death. We lie around and try to sleep.

13.03.02 – Health Improvement And Boredom

It is early in the morning and still dark outside. Jakob still has problems with his stomach and hence could not sleep at all. At five a clock, he has to vomit but feels a lot better afterwards and is in a good condition as well as Stefan who just walked to the bathroom (25 meters distance) without even having any problem. We are optimistic that we can leave that facility today.



The bill won't be low as a nurse explained us that foreigners pay 50 times as much as the locals so that it might cost more than NZ\$500 each. We are glad we did not forget to subscribe for a foreign country medical care just a couple of hours before we left Germany. Stefan, who can read, learns in the insurance contract that they will pay everything: the ambulance, the ward, medicine, everything. The only problem is that we have to pay in advance. Luckily, Stefan brought his EC-cash card with him enabling us to withdraw money out of every ATM here. But anyway we guess that the traveler checks will be enough.

After breakfast, the doctor who is from Myanmar comes in with a team of students and tells them about our state. We both feel a lot better and Jakob has no problems with his eyes anymore. We are proud to serve this group as scientific examples for their interesting research.

Nevertheless it is very boring as there is nothing to do except for reading. We hang around, have our lunch and dinner (the latter around four o'clock!) and then receive bad news: We both have to stay for one more night. Whereas Stefan got already rid of his infusion-cable and his medication has been stopped, Jakob still gets his medical treatment even though he does not suffer from any

symptoms anymore. That sucks because this tremendous increase of fluids in his body makes him run to the toilet more often than usual. And walking with this infusion apparatus is not really fun.

Later, they transfer us to a private room where we have our own bathroom and a TV which only receives the Cook Islands local program showing either daily soaps or prayer-shows. We are looking forward to getting out of here. We try to sleep quite early.

14.03.02 – Oh... Sweet Liberty!



We both wake up long before sunrise. At half past eight we finally get breakfast which unfortunately does not fill us enough. Meanwhile, Jakob opened his infusions valve hoping he will get rid of it when the nurses see that it is finally empty. But the opposite is the case: “Oh my gosh, your infusion is almost empty! I will replace it in a minute...”. Oh thank you, that is his fifth bottle now within two and a half days only!

Piri and Ulrike visit us later and tell us to give them a ring so that they can pick us up. Meanwhile, there is no doubt for us anymore that there must be a sexual relationship between this woman and the Coconut King for we got to know that the locals always call him the “Master of Disaster” not only because of the untidy mess he is living in but also because of his frequent affairs with tourists. What a nice lifestyle!

Right now, we are still waiting for the doctor from Myanmar who finally comes at half past one. After a last blood test, we are allowed to leave and receive the surprisingly high bill (about 590 NZ\$ each). Piri takes our luggage to his hostel while we go to “town”, rent a motor bike, buy some stuff and celebrate our release with two liters of ice cream.



Then we drive to *Vara's* where we meet Lorena again who is happy to see us. In the evening we go to *Staircase* to watch the island night which is good but not as good as the one on Aitutaki. Afterwards, we dance a bit and go home to Piri's at twelve o'clock.

15.03.02 – The Strong Current

What a pleasure to sleep at Piri's where the sunsets will now make us dream for the rest of the evenings we have left on the Cook Islands. The mosquitoes bite us quite a few times but we are just happy to be out of the hospital. We get up at a quarter to eleven and drive to *Vara's* in order to organize more diving trips. After many phone calls we decide to go with *Dive Rarotonga* again.

Downtown, we swap our bike as the engine keeps shutting down while driving. We go to the bank, buy some food and go back to Piri's where we want to snorkel again.

We go back to the passage with the gap in the coral reef that we explored a couple of weeks earlier. Jumping in, we realize that the current is dangerously strong. We can hardly control our movements and Stefan even gets pulled downwards whereas Jakob is being sucked into the open sea. Without our flippers we would still be swimming in the South Pacific. Somehow, the fishes around us deal way better with this situation than us.

The way back into the lagoon is even harder as we are drifting away from the lagoon and do not move forwards at all, even as we are paddling like hell with our flippers. The only possibility for us to get back to the beach is "climbing" underwater: we pull ourselves forwards on the corals which is not too pleasant as we don't really know if some of them are poisonous. But we are moving slowly towards the beach. After a very exhausting way back, we are happy to reach the hostel. This was by far the strongest current we ever experienced and we are now able to imagine how easily you can drown in these wild waters. We will never snorkel in a passage again without any information about the tide! But as we return to the lagoon, the sunset makes up for all the trouble.



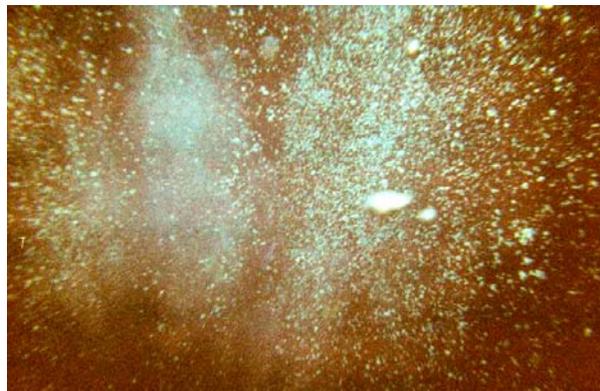
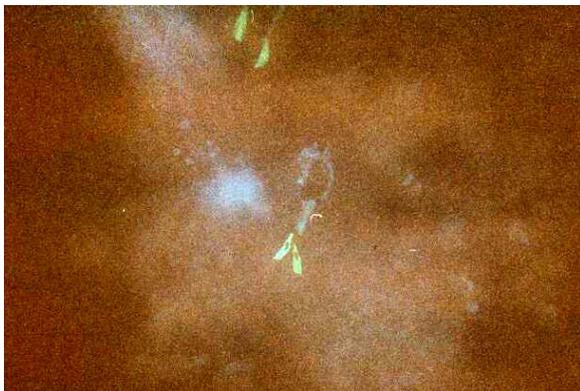
We enjoy some rice with corned beef and get ready for Friday night. We first go to *Tiare Village*, a hostel where we play cards with a German girl called Alex and the English girl called Rachel we once met at *Trader Jack's*. Then we go to *Staircase* where Jakob sings *All Shook Up* and *Blueberry Hill* at the karaoke show. Later, Stefan sings *Tennessee Waltz* which is unfortunately extremely different from the song that we know and anyway, the acoustics are really bad. At twelve o'clock, Jakob takes the bus home to Piri's and Stefan leaves one hour later.

16.03.02 – Sharks

We get up very early and drive to the hospital for a blood-test. Its result shows that we are nearly as strong as before our trip to Atiu, but on Monday we have to go there again just to make sure we are alright before we fly back to Germany. We pay the bill, buy some food and go back.

At one o'clock, we go diving again. Even though Lorena wanted to join us, she does not show up. The place where we go diving and snorkeling is not far away from the shipwreck where we started last time. Originally we intended to go to a site with tunnels and caves but as the boat's engine breaks down due to a destroyed power cable we cannot go out too far. Despite the stormy and rainy weather during the recent days, the visibility is still up to 50 meters.

This time, Stefan dives under several coral structures and we both see even more different fishes than we did last time. After a while we finally detect what we always wanted to see underwater. A white tipped reef shark approaches majestically. We are both fascinated by its elegant movement and its beauty. This animal is definitely the king of this coral reef and the water seems to be moving around him instead of him moving around in the water. With a length of about 150-200cm, this is the biggest fish we have ever seen underwater. At the end of the scuba dive, Stefan sees a stonefish, a very poisonous small dragon which Jakob even saw in the lagoon once before. 60% of those who step on it die a few hours later. So we better make an exception from our normal provoking with snorkel and flippers.



After Stefan comes up from 30m depth, Jakob, who goes down up to 18m (according to the dive master's depth gauge), sees a huge swarm consisting of at least 150-200 fishes which are about 20cm long. We both enjoyed this trip very much. We relax for the rest of the day and go to bed quite early.



17.03.02 – Dirt And Mud

We get up early in the morning. Today it is time for hiking: We'll do the cross island trek! About two minutes before we start, we meet Alley, a girl from England who has just arrived at Piri's. We ask her if she wants to join us and she surprisingly agrees even though we told her that she will become dirty and muddy.



We take the bus to Avatiu harbor which is situated in the north of the island and start walking southwards. The first kilometers consist of a paved road, soon later we reach a meadow and from now on we go directly through the bush. This is great fun as we have to cross big brown puddles which are deep enough to fill our boots with mud. It has also started raining which actually is exactly what we wanted as we can now explore the rainforest with all our senses. The lush overgrown interior of the island is very

beautiful. The shapes of the trees which often are overgrown by ivy are so strange and mysterious that we hardly trust our eyes.



The path is extremely small and gets steeper and steeper and steeper and roots make the path so slippery that we need to use our hands. Advancing, we realize that we are moving on an only one meter wide path and next to us, it goes down several hundred meters whereas falling down might be stopped by bush and trees.

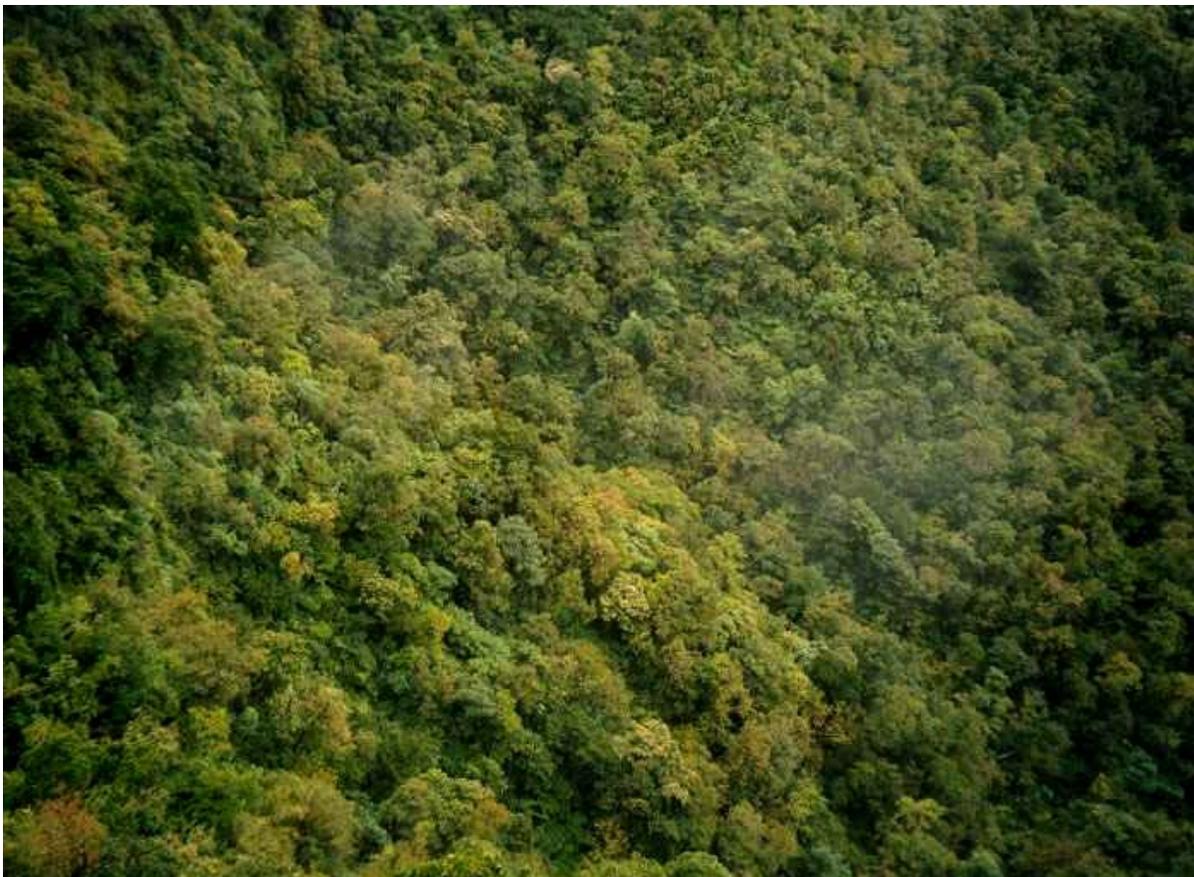




Reaching the top of the hill, we can see the needle through the leaves, a mystic giant 30m tall rock. As Alley is a heavy smoker, she needs to have a rest while we pay the needle a visit.

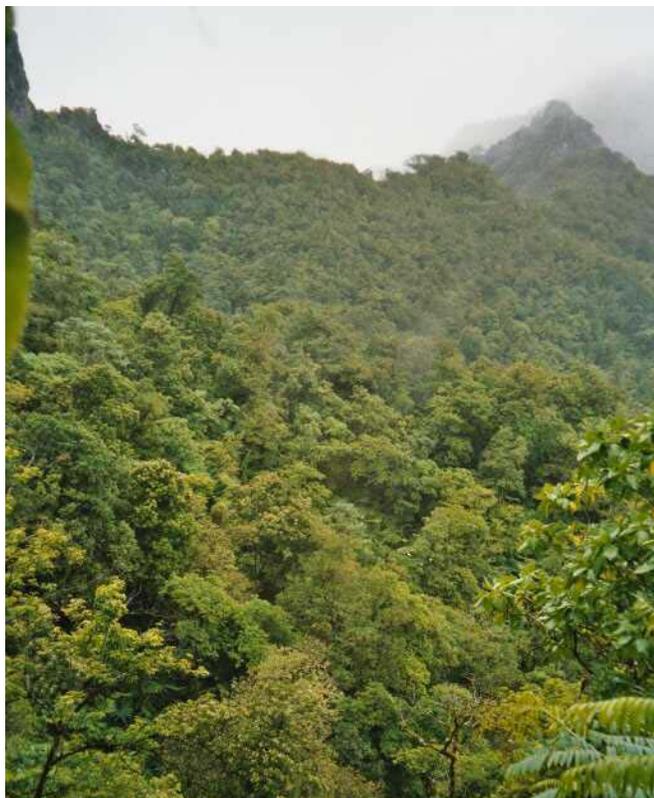


Five minutes later we reach the wall. We better don't read the warning signs while continuing this track. First, we have to climb to the wall which is very difficult as the ground is very loose and there is nothing to get a grip. Ten meters later we go on the slippery rock saved only by a chain and later by a knotted robe. Leaving this would make us fall down maybe 100m into certain death. After 20 more meters we have to stop this as the robe as well as the wall goes straight up. This would just be way too dangerous for us. We have a breathtaking view and see both coasts. The wind up here is so strong that Stefan nearly loses his cap. The different kinds of forests are incredibly fascinating. We can hardly believe how many various landscapes there are on such a small island. Down at the jungle, we see white birds flying around above the trees. Together it is just perfect! We love this untouched scenery.

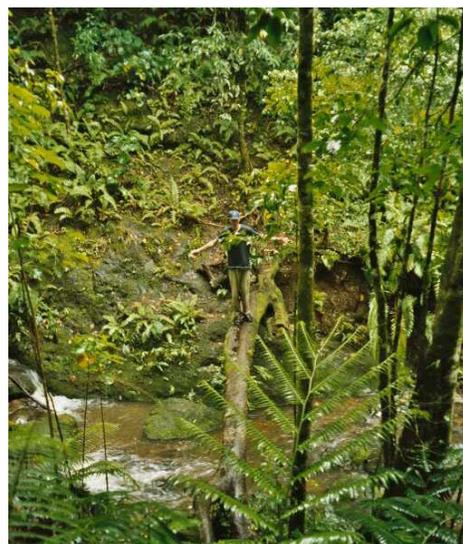
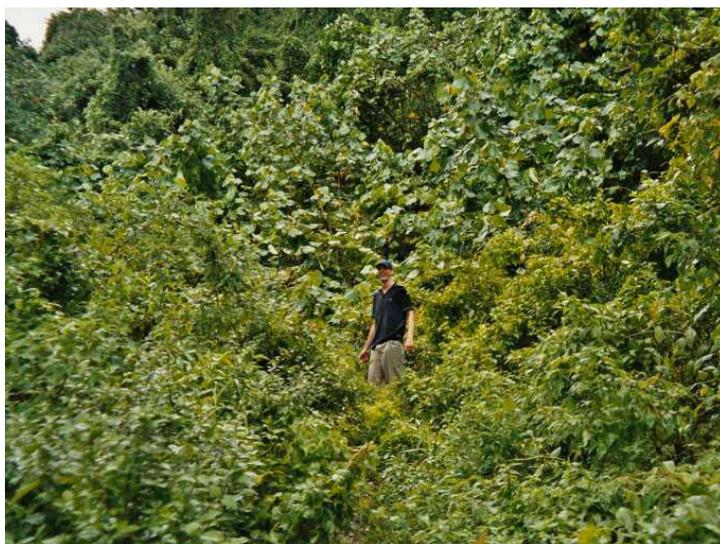




The way down proves one more time that climbing down is often more difficult than climbing up. We have to slide on our butts and hold the chain all the time. Alley, who meanwhile almost got eaten alive by mosquitoes, could have never done this trip for her shoes are not suitable.

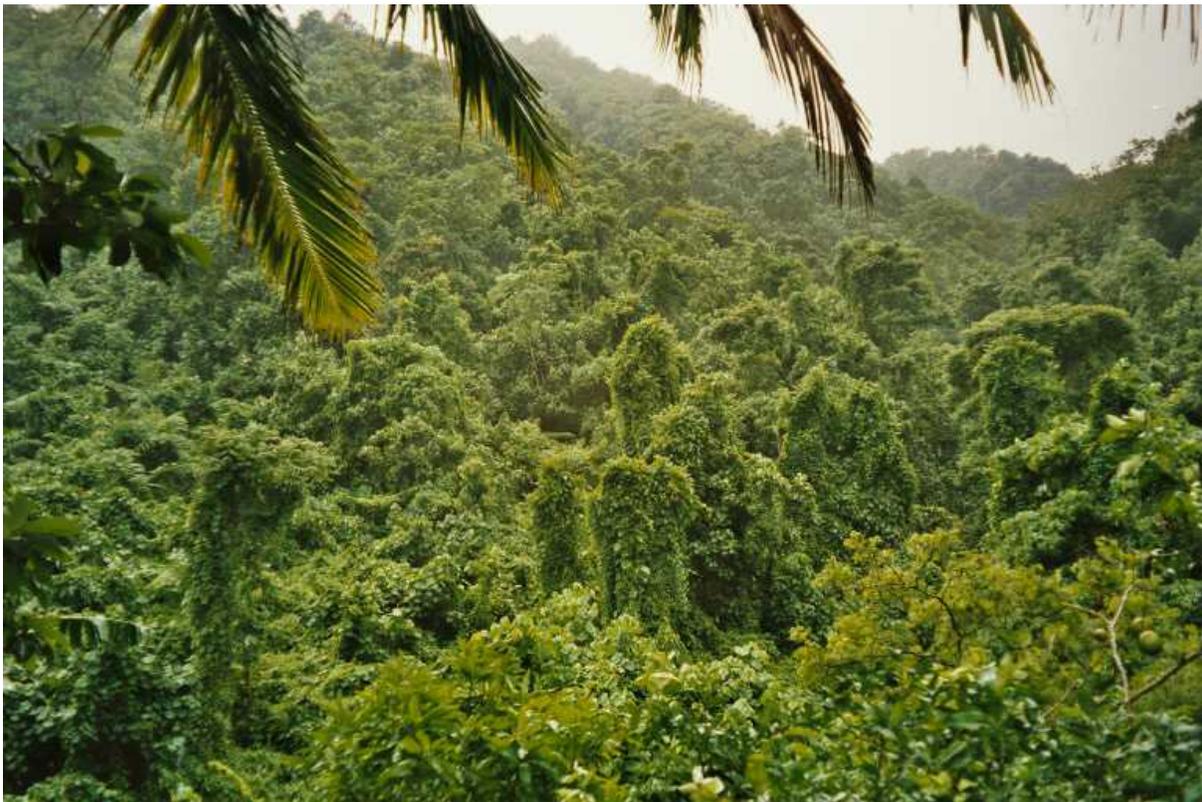


Now we continue the trek to Wigmore's waterfall. Again, we get extremely muddy and wet as we have to cross the stream several times. It is now impossible to recognize where the path is supposed to go along as it is so small and overgrown. When there are two potential tracks on both sides of the river, we get separated as Stefan does not want to come on Jakob's and Alleys side thinking the two tracks will come together later. This does not turn out to be the case as he loses them quickly. He sees the cross island trek arrow which is the leading sign for the hike and decides to search them instead of waiting which is again the wrong decision as we don't meet.



The last kilometers are really beautiful for we see huge ferns and many interesting plants we have never seen before in this untouched jungle. We can't get enough of this beautiful scenery...





Alley and Jakob reach the waterfall but are disappointed, as the scene is not very impressive with all the trash lying around at the site.



On his way to the waterfall, Stefan decides to use his orientation rather than the tracks he is walking. As he knows where the coast is, he decides to go directly through the bush. Sometimes, it gets very steep and he uses the huge ferns to hold himself. Reaching the waterfall one and a half

hours later, Stefan, full of mud, walks directly into the waterfall's pool and thereby washes his shoes and pants a little bit.



Back at the hostel, we agree that we really enjoyed this trip very much. But to be honest, we are not too sure about Alley ("I feel like throwing up!"). She definitely did not take enough time after her arrival from rainy England to get accustomed to the hot and humid climate here.

Later that day, we watch one of Piri's shows which turns out to be quite interesting. He still knows how to make fire without any matches or lighter and climbs up the coconut tree within a few seconds only. This guy is really in a good shape for a 61 years old man!

The rest of the day we hang around and talk to a Swedish couple that also stays at Piri's. In the evening, Stefan waits for *Rarotonga Divers* to pick him up for a night dive but they don't come which is not too bad as he saved 95 NZ\$ and those who once did a night dive were not too enthusiastic about it. Later we cook rice with Indian tomatoes out of a can and go to bed afterwards.



18.03.02 – Good Bye Cook Islands

Oh no, another blood test! Whereas Jakob has no problems with that, Stefan still hates needles and blood. Fortunately, it is the last visit to the hospital and the first time that our blood facts are completely normal. We say good bye to the kind doctor from Myanmar and the nice nurses.



At half past nine we leave and drive to the chamber of commerce which is closed again. We then check our emails and go to *Vara's* to say farewell to some backpackers. In the afternoon we go to Avarua again, give back our motorbike and invest part of the deposit into two liters of ice cream and some bread. Mmmh, this combination of coconut and banana tastes very good and we enjoy our lunch, but after two liters we really have enough ice cream for the next two months. Hoping that our blood sugar will ever recover from that, we change New Zealand Dollars into US Dollars and Euros and then get some souvenirs and presents at *Perfumes of Rarotonga* with a surprisingly high discount.



Back at Piri's, Stefan makes a deal with the Coconut King to create a homepage for him. But this will unfortunately never take place since the Master of Disaster does not know how to reply emails. We pack our luggage for the last time and take a group photo with the Swedish couple and Alley. After this session we break off for our last South Pacific sunset. Oh man, we will miss that nice beach with all these shells, corals, the endless Pacific Ocean, the burning red clouds in the evening, the swaying coconut trees, the unbelievable friendliness of the Cook Islands-Maori...





In the evening, Piri takes Alley, Ulrike and us to a small restaurant where we enjoy our last cheap but tasty dinner. At a quarter to eleven, Piri gives us a ride to the airport. We are reminded on the beginning of our trip one month ago. It has also just rained, the air is warm and humid, and it is late at night. But what once seemed so mysterious is now part of our life. We take a last picture of Piri Puruto III and say “E no’o ra” to the Cook Islands.



19.03.02 – The Shortest Day

We check in without any problems, which is good because there are a few corals in our bags that we are not allowed to take home with us. The plane leaves on time and we enjoy the service on board of *Air New Zealand* where the seats are comfortable enough to find a few hours of sleep. We sit in the middle of the plane and the seat between us is empty.

We arrive in Los Angeles at twelve o'clock and eat some Caesar salad, Chinese food and *Häagen-Dazs* ice cream at the airport (really expensive) as we know from experience that food is a limited good on *Lufthansa* planes.

In the plane we meet a German we have seen at *Vara's* before and who now sits next to us. He tells us interesting stories about all the South Pacific islands he has visited which is sometimes very entertaining. When one of the food carts hits Stefan's knee and the stewardess does not excuse her for this we realize that good service is a limited good as well: "Please watch your knee when you put it into the aisle". But what annoys us most are the uncomfortable and small seats for an eleven hours plus flight. But in the end, we don't really care since by now, the only thing that counts is the sweet and unforgettable experience we made on the Cook Islands.



At about ten o'clock, we finally arrive at Frankfurt which is a big contrast to what we have seen the last month: it is a cold day in a city that just looks grey and ugly compared to all these beautiful and colorful islands. We try to hitchhike but no one takes us with him. As it has also started raining and we are of course only dressed with a t-shirt, we decide to take the next train to Freiburg. We arrive in the afternoon and are happy to be back home.

Final Words

Life is really funny sometimes. After our troubling journey in Cameroon where we faced constant culture shock and a difficult environment, we now went to a place full of palm trees, beaches, coconuts and, for us, the world's most beautiful sunsets. But this time, we ended up in a hospital!

But the most impressive part of this travel were the Maori people. Their kindness has yet to be matched in this world. And if you read all the positive descriptions we made about them, remember that you should take into consideration that we are Germans and hence genetically forced to focus on the bad things.

All in all, Polynesia was terrific and we are sure that in our life, we will come back to this part of the world again...

