

Rapa Nui Trip Report

Chuck and Linda on svJacaranda

Dates: January 24 - Feb. 6, 2017

Intro: Rapa Nui is expensive. We went for the first week of the annual two-week long Tapati Festival and spent another week hiking, horseback riding, touring and exploring the island with its famous Moai stone statues. Surfing is quite good just off the village. Diving is also available. It was great being in Polynesia and being able to communicate in Spanish although English is fairly widely spoken as is the Rapa Nui language. If you are not there during the Tapati, be sure to see an evening dinner dance show at one of the restaurants. The Rapa Nui are friendly but seemed a little jaded from the tourist influx (mainly Chileans) that occurs during the Festival. There are 80,000 tourists a year. Population of the island (2014): 6,000 with Chilean immigrants now outnumbering the Rapa Nui.

The UNESCO World Heritage island is 63 sq. miles, about twice the size of Manhattan, NY. There is one small town, Hanga Roa, and two beaches on the island. Hanga Roa has three main streets.

The modern history of the Rapa Nui people is a shocking secret - the inhabitants were herded into an internment camp on their own island for 60 years by the Chilean government and a sheep company. Freedom only came in 1970 - in our own lifetime. You won't find this in any book (see Resources at the end of this Report).

Tapati Cultural Festival

The Tapati Festival is a fantastic cultural experience that was like a combination of the Marquesas Matava'a and the Heiva in Tahiti - the evening dancing was held on a formal stage with lighting,

microphones, and a big screen TV yet it was down-to-earth and community based. It takes place over two weeks in the beginning of February. Two “queens” and their warriors (aito) are chosen every year and the island’s community is divided between them into two teams, vying for points awarded by a panel of judges in many different types of competitions: dancing, singing, music, costumes, body painting, crafts, and athletic contests. The team with the most points wins and the queen and her aito reign for one year. The island gets crowded with tourists, many from Chile.

Money

Official currency is the Chilean peso (CLP) but US dollars are readily accepted (at a lower exchange rate of course).

The official exchange rate was 634 pesos/dollar but we used 600 pesos/ dollar to include the fee of changing money (4000-5000/transaction). This is the rate many stores will use so better to pay in pesos.

Three ATM’s: Airport, Banco Estado, and Banco Santander; the gas station will exchange money as well. Santander Bank has a withdrawal limit of 150,000 with a fee of 5000. Banco Estado allowed us to withdraw more money at a lower fee (4000). Credit cards are widely accepted.

Airfare from Tahiti on LAN Chile (LATAM)

Flight from Papeete is once a week at terrible hours. Plane departs Papeete at 2:30 a.m. and arrives at 1 PM. Departs Rapa Nui at 11:40 pm and arrives Papeete at 12:30 am.

Flight is 4 1/2 hours.

Our fare was 44,881 with taxes (Corinne went in March 2016 and paid 53000 XPF including taxes).

Food is terrible on the plane - we didn’t eat it on the return flight.

Visas

Rapa Nui is part of Chile. Citizens of USA, EU, Australia, and Canada don't need visas. For US citizens, there is no entry fee.

Length of stay

If you are not there for the Tapati, we recommend that 4-7 days is enough - 2 days of overview tour, explore the town, do a horseback ride and a few hikes. You can surf, dive, and rent a car to return to some of the sights.

Time

Sunrise and sunset are artificially late since the time has been manipulated to be more compatible with mainland Chile (called "the continent").

Sunrise was about 8 and sunset was at 8:30.

This is important to know if you are a photography buff and want to go to some of the Moai sites to get some recommended dawn and sunset pictures.

National Park Pass

We recommend that you get your National Park Pass at the small booth at the airport for US \$80.00 cash when you first arrive (one of you get in line for customs and the other buy the tickets - make sure you have enough US\$ for this altho there is an ATM there if you prefer). You are also given a map of the island. You can alternatively buy the pass outside of town at the Park Ranger Office but this location is not so convenient. You will need to show the ticket to rangers at several sites around the island and it is required at Orongo and Rano Raraku where it is only valid for one entry.

You are given free insect repellent at the airport when you arrive. Mosquitos are pesky and dengue does exist. This stuff is DEET. Be careful not to touch it to your face or mouth; a friend's mother

had to go to the hospital because her lips were so swollen from it.

Wifi

Very slow wifi was available from our Keu Henua pension for most of the time we were there except it stopped completely the last few days. There are several wifi hotspots provided by the government around town and the best are either at the small park on Atama Takena Street (with the busts) or at the tourist information office in town.

Water

Water from the tap is potable and we drank it, refilling our water bottles.

Language

Official language is Spanish; local language is Rapa Nui. English is often spoken although not everywhere.

Basic Rapa Nui phrases:

Hello: laorana korua

How are you: Pehe Koe?

Good, fine: Riva Riva.

Thank you: Mauruuru

Hotels

Keu Henua EcoHostal (Elvira)**

<http://www.keuhenua.com/?lang=en>

info@keuhenua.com

\$115/night

1,086,400 for 13 nights plus 1/2 day

Loved the location: It was a perfect location for the Tapati and an easy walk into town and yet was quiet. Located in a garden/greenhouse setting near the cemetery. Owner Elvira picked us up at the airport and placed a Rapa Nui lei made of a colorful ti leaf around our necks. Elvira is great and helped us with car rentals and activity bookings although she doesn't speak much English. The staff was very friendly and spoke some english. The rooms, in a cluster of bungalows, are very comfortable, each having a refrigerator and a small outside sitting area (very close to one another). The dining room is beautiful with its painted mural, the breakfast is good (altho it got a little repetitious after 2 weeks) with fresh juice from the garden, and you do have the use of the kitchen.

Manavai Hotel, Te Pito O Te Nua Street

Looked nice, had beautiful landscaped grounds, and was located in the middle of town. But we heard this location in town might be noisy. We didn't really check it out or know any one who stayed there.

Pikera Uri EcoLodge

<http://www.pikerauri.com/galeria-pikera-uri-lodge-isla-de-pascua/>

This is the accommodation run by Pantu who does the horseback riding. We stopped there to outfit ourselves for the horses so got to look around. Very nice with a nice looking breakfast. Downside - the horses are corralled nearby so you get the horse smell; it is a little bit further out from town (near the Museum).

Recommendation: be sure your pension has window screens due to the mosquitos.

We saw some really really nice vacation bungalows/cabanas near the cemetery across from Ahu Tahai that would be perfect for a larger group/family.

Tourist Office

The Chilean tourist information organization called SERNATUR has an office just by the ocean below the town center, at the other side of the road from the restaurant Pea. They will help you out with any question or concern you may have. It is also a wifi hotspot and had one of the stronger signals.

Tours:

- Easter Island Spirit (James) - <http://www.easterislandspirit.com/>
info@easterislandspirit.com
This was our first choice since James Grant-Peterkin was the author of the great guide book we used (see Resources). However, he was fully booked - we spoke to him on the phone and he was really nice - he recommended the following two tour guides.
- Green Island Tours (Marc) - <http://www.gitourseasterisland.com/en>. We met Marc while on a hike one day and he was really friendly.
- Easter Island Travel (Marcus) - <https://www.easterisland.travel/>
Brother-in-law Jose was our guide (native Rapa Nui). Very good. We took two tours - Tour A: Journey of Legends (US\$90 per person in a small group) and another Tour B: Megaliths (US\$90 per person)

Hop-on-Hop-off bus

Total time - 4 hours.

Open bus that travels to 20 major points around the whole island. Departs from the Catholic Church four times a day. Buy tickets at Travel office (Av. Pont). (569) 97155811

Ballets/ Shows

If you are not in Rapa Nui during the Tapati, definitely go see one or more of these great shows! Dinner is often an umu (earth oven) traditional meal.

Te Ra'ai - Haha Varua* (our friend was a dancer in this group)

Moauri Tupuna

Kari Kari

Vai Te Mihi

Rental Car

Oceanic Rental Car:

50,000 /day with no insurance for a 4 seater Suzuki, the cheapest car available.

Horse back riding

Cabalgata Pantu - highly recommended

<http://www.pikerauri.com/caballos-pantu-pikera-uri-lodge-isla-de-pascua/>

Pantu picked us up at our pension, took us to his pension (Pikera Uri Eco Lodge) where we paid and got outfitted, then drove us to the horses which were in the field near Terevaka.

Rode to Terevaka - beautiful ride with sweeping vistas from the top.

35,000 each - gives you riding hat and velcro chaps for legs.

Horses were good and well cared for. Mau, our guide was good but spoke very little english. There were 3 other people in our group who had never ridden before and did not know how to control their horses. The horses kept bunching up rather than

walking in single file and it was annoying that the others couldn't control them.

We were lucky that we had no wind but it poured rain when we got back down to the bottom of the hill and rode back to Pantu's (which we elected to do rather than being transported by car again).

Shopping

Food: Freshly grown local veggies are available for sale from trucks on the main street - sweet potatoes, tomatoes, pineapple, watermelon, calabash, bananas.

Food Market: SuperMercado Hinova

Crafts - high quality pieces are OUTRAGEOUSLY expensive.

Carved wood - makoi very expensive wood that the higher quality carvings are made from. Carvers: Luis Hey, Beni Tuki - US\$500 and up for better carvings.

Kind of tapa called mahute (from paper mulberry trees) sold with drawings or paintings.

There are several types of shells found here but three are exclusively endemic: a brown spotted cowrie, black snails, and small white whorls.

Accessories and jewelry also use feathers.

Galleries:

Artesan market near church

Market in town (Atama Takena Street) - sells veggies inside as well as crafts and sells fish outside in morning

Mana Gallery - High quality, very high-end. Petero Atamu Street near the cemetery

Hotu Matua's Favorite Shoppe - Atama Takena Street

Anakena Artisan

Oscar's Manaroa (on Te Pito O Te Nua Street)

Restaurants

- Te Moana - a little more upscale. Good food. On the shore with ocean view.
- La Kaleta - great view
- Manuia ** - Petero Atamu Street near the cemetery - this was our go-to restaurant for dinner - good basic food for lunch and dinner at a good price. Our tour guide took us here. It was close to our lodging.
- Kanhau* - Atama Takena Street
- Tatuku Vave** - great seafood and beautiful vista - a short walk from town.
- Christian's Roulette Truck - good hamburgers. Usually located across from the park and the Te Moana restaurant.
- Mikafe - best ice cream including local flavors Hai'i (fruit) and tiare (flower). Nice people watching at the wharf
- Haka Honu
- Polynesian Coffee and Tea - Cute little cafe with outdoor front deck (Atama Takena Street)
- Kotarao - Japanese Restaurant - supposed to be great - #1 on Tripadvisor but we didn't get a chance to eat here.
- Te Moai Sunset - friends said it was good - it was closed the night we went so we didn't get a chance to try it. Across from the Ahu Tahai)
- Cafe Ra'a - did not like the dinner we got there - not recommended

Hanga Roa Anchorage for Sailboats

There were 6 sailboats anchored off Hanga Roa (one was a local charter) and two cruise ships (they stay for one day). "The ocean floor is rocky and treacherous" but there were several moorings located quite a distance from the shore -outside beyond the

swell and wave break that provides great surfing. “Weather at Easter Island is very spontaneous, and wind can change quickly. With this in mind, always make sure you anchor well, and always have your sail boat manned by at least one person.” (Easter Island Travel)

Miscellaneous

Remember:

Always carry a light rain jacket - weather is variable

Wear sunscreen and a hat

You are given free insect repellent at the airport when you arrive.

Mosquitos are pesky and dengue does exist. This stuff is DEET.

Be careful not to touch it to your face or mouth; a friend’s mother had to go to the hospital because her lips were so swollen from it.

PaePae - Nice little book store - on Te Pito O Te Nua Street

Go to the Post Office and get your passport stamped for fun!

Museum - Museo Antropologico P. Sebastian Englert - this Museum was closed for renovations while we were there but I was able to get a private behind the scenes tour of the collection with the curator since I previously had a museum career. This was especially meaningful for me since some of their most important collection items are not on public display in the exhibit hall.

Movie - The Manavai Hotel on one of the main streets, Te Pito O Te Nua Street, screens a Hollywood movie several times a week called “Rapa Nui” made in 1994 produced by Kevin Costner. It was a huge flop but has spectacular photography (so we read).

Body painting: called “Takona” is really spectacular. Visitors can be painted, costumed and then have their photo taken with the Moai by several businesses around town. While this was a touristy thing we thought we would never be caught dead doing, our friends did it with their two kids and I have to say it was one of the best keepsakes of their trip.

Resources

Books**

We always use the Lonely Planet guidebook and Trip Advisor in our travels.

There is an excellent guidebook we highly recommend you buy: “A Companion to Easter Island” by James Grant-Peterkin. <http://www.easterislandspirit.com/the-book/> It contains information on every single significant archaeological site of Rapa Nui, and also includes the best times to visit each site, best light for photography and even the times to avoid coinciding with large tour buses. You’ll find suggested itineraries, maps of the town and the island, as well as restaurant recommendations and additional activities. Grant-Peterkin is also the British Consul to Rapa Nui and has a tour guide company.

Useful Websites:

<https://imaginaisladepascua.com/en/>

Restaurants: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g316040-Easter_Island.html

Films

Documentary: *Rapa Nui, The Secret History of Easter Island* (2015). Producer/director Virginie Adoutte. Highly recommended to watch this shocking and eye-opening history of how the Rapa Nui were herded into an internment camp on their own island for

60 years. This appalling little-known history is modern, recent and occurred in our own lifetime - ending in the 1970's!!

<http://en.fifo-tahiti.com/2015/02/virginie-adoutte-the-story-of-rapa-nui-had-to-be-told-and-shown-eventually/>

Documentary: "*The Hidden Secret of the Statues on Easter Island*" (2014). One hour. A theory about how the statues were moved. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mH0sljAHBVY>

Articles

Police evict Rapa Nui clan from Easter Island hotel (2011)

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-12378736>

Trouble in paradise for Chile's Easter Island (2014)

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-26951566>

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/07/easter-island/bloch-text>

<http://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2013/12/09/249728994/what-happened-on-easter-island-a-new-even-scarier-scenario>