

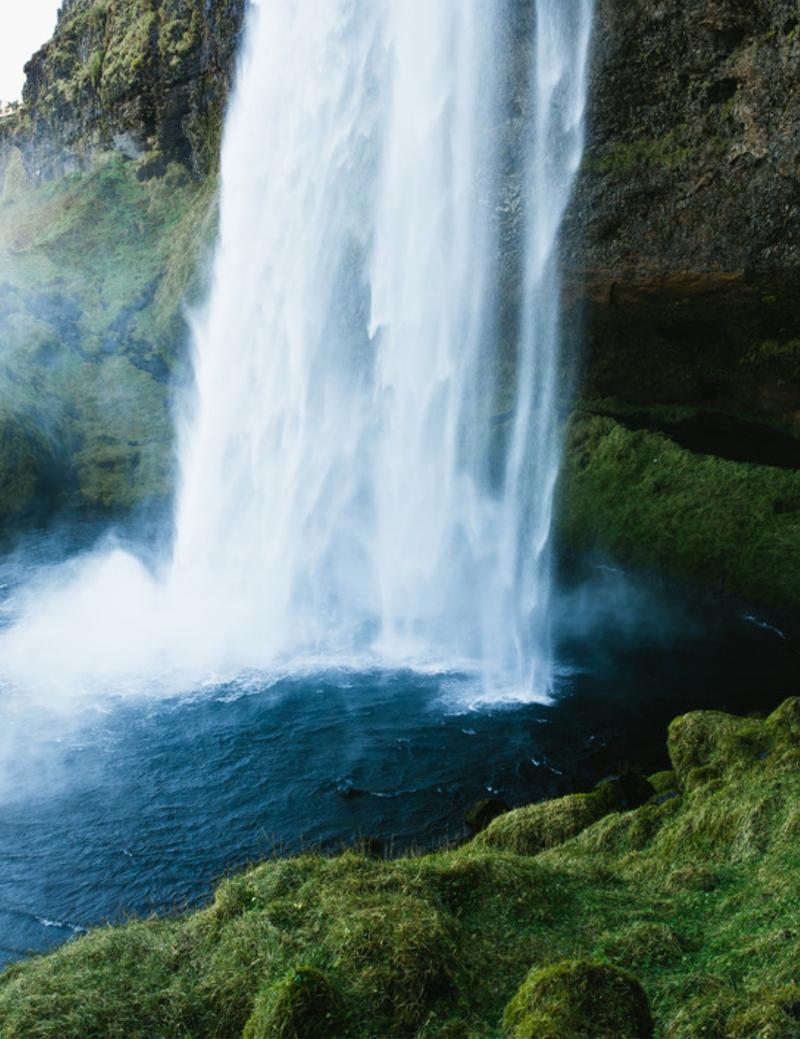


SPOTLIGHT
THE SOUTH PACIFIC

SO MUCH MORE THAN A HONEYMOON
DESTINATION



The South Pacific's combination of peacock-colored lagoons, rugged islands and sunshine create a fabled holiday destination, especially for honeymooners. Yet it isn't only lovebirds who'll enjoy this vast and varied region, which also offers culture, adventure and big-city life.



The obvious attractions of the South Pacific islands are legendary. We've all dreamed of fleeing winter and waking up to surf on a blue lagoon, or escaping to islands where locals offer big smiles, tropical fruit falls from the trees, and life is languid. Honeymooners in particular come here to find all the romantic stereotypes of sunset beaches, hibiscus flowers and overwater bungalows.



There's much more to the South Pacific than just friendly people and lovely landscapes, though. You can encounter indigenous cultures, follow the routes of European explorers, and learn about the region's compelling World War Two history. You can also enjoy a wide range of activities and experiences, from jungle and mountain trekking to bungee-jumping.

High Culture

The South Pacific has a long history. In French Polynesia, Raiatea is notable for its ruined temples, allowing a glimpse into the Polynesian past. On remote Easter Island, huge moai stone statues are symbols of a vanished culture that baffles archaeologists and intrigue visitors.

On Tahiti's south coast, you'll find the Gauguin Museum, paying homage to the great French painter who made the island his home. In New Caledonia, the stunning ultra-modern architecture of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre houses a fine collection of Pacific art and sculpture. And in Wellington, Te Papa is a world-class museum proving an interactive high-tech overview of New Zealand's Maori and European history, environment and geology.



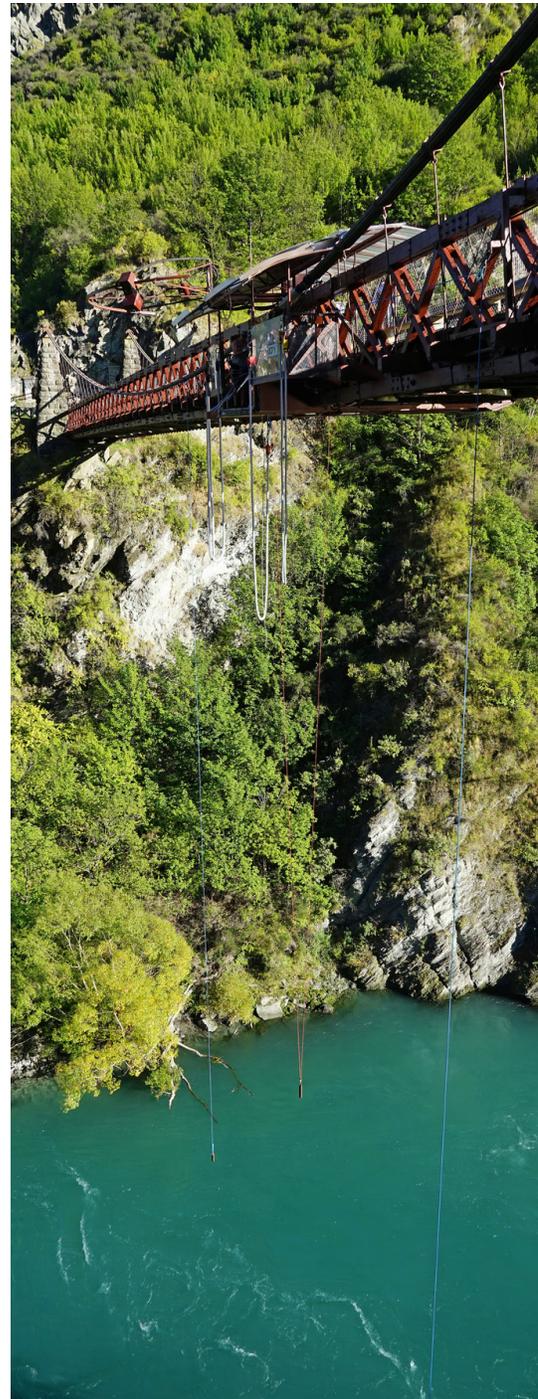
Local Life

Maori culture is alive and well in New Zealand and, happily, much of South Pacific culture lives on elsewhere. Papua New Guinea offers encounters with rich and diverse tribal cultures, showcased in spectacular festivals, village visits and community dances. Fiji combines contemporary Melanesian, Indian and Chinese influences.

In Tahiti, you'll find a combination of European elegance and relaxed Pacific attitudes, plus a great food scene, whether you're wandering markets piled with tropical fruit or haunting the harbor-side roulettes (food vans) alongside promenading locals. French flair combines with indigenous ingredients in dishes such as poisson cru, a salad of fresh tuna in coconut milk.

Such intriguing cultural mixes in everything from food to language and arts are a feature not just of Tahiti but of many South Pacific islands. Even the smallest of destinations provide delightful cultural clashes.

Ouvéa, one of the Loyalty Islands off New Caledonia, might be a French territory, but a history of British missionary influence means that church services are finished with a rousing chorus of 'God Save the Queen' and locals play cricket, strictly a woman's game here.





Big Brothers

The South Pacific isn't just about islands and atolls, but also offers cities.

New Zealand's capital Wellington combines old-fashioned coziness with avant-garde flair and a lively contemporary dining scene. Dunedin – where the South Pacific begins to get decidedly chilly – has a fascinating Scots heritage, and is surely the only place in the Pacific where you'll find a castle, kilt maker and whiskey distillery.

If you're exploring the South Pacific on a cruise ship, you'll find Auckland one of the world's most scenic harbors. Even Auckland, though, is outdone by Sydney, whose foreshores are lined with both elegant suburbs and rugged national parkland. Sydney Opera House is the jewel in the crown, perching on the water's edge like a ship in full sail.

Australia's east coast is part of the South Pacific too, the decidedly big whale to the Pacific's many minnow islands. It offers the same combination of city life, scenery and outdoor adventure that makes the whole region so attractive, and so much more than just a honeymoon hotspot.

