

[NEW ZEALAND \(/NEWS/NATIONAL\)](#) / [COVID-19 \(/NEWS/COVID-19\)](#)

Cook Islands travel bubble step closer but hinges on no community transmission

40 minutes ago

[Jonathan Mitchell \(/authors/jonathan-mitchell\)](#), Journalist

[@jonomitchellnz \(https://twitter.com/@jonomitchellnz\)](#) [✉ jonathan.mitchell@rnz.co.nz \(mailto:jonathan.mitchell@rnz.co.nz?subject=Cook%20Islands%20travel%20bubble%20step%20closer%20but%20hinges%20on%20no%20community%20transmission\)](mailto:jonathan.mitchell@rnz.co.nz)

New Zealanders could be lounging on a Rarotongan beach this summer as the push for a travel bubble with the Cook Islands progresses.



File photo. Photo: Airport Authority Cook Islands
(<https://www.facebook.com/airportscookislands/photos/a.578667968988403/578667258988474>)

The newly-appointed Cooks Prime Minister Mark Brown said formal arrangements had been made.

The only barrier seems to be each country keeping community transmission free for four weeks.

Andrew Whittaker is the chief executive of Island Hotels in Rarotonga - and has a couple of beach front resorts ready and waiting for Kiwi travellers.

"Our locals have looked after us as much as they can - but it's very important now that we see some international visitors coming back," he said.

The Cooks Islands has reported zero cases of Covid-19.

Talks towards creating an Auckland-to-Rarotonga travel bubble were well advanced in July, with officials from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to travel to the Cook Islands to make final checks.

But the brakes went on swiftly (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/423361/the-cook-islands-tightens-borders-over-nz-covid-cases>) after a Covid-19 cluster emerged in Auckland.

Brown was sworn in as the new Prime Minister of the Cooks last week and was keen to get things back on track.

He has already been on the phone with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to thrash out some of the travel bubble plans.

Brown was optimistic (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/427655/new-cooks-pm-expects-nz-travel-bubble-by-december>) - saying there were still a few technical points to iron out and officials have to assess various protocols.

But Ardern said a travel bubble hinged on no community transmission in both countries for 28 days.

"Twenty-eight days - but also making sure that we've got that clear separation for passengers ... once that's all in place then yes we'll be in a position to open," she said.

That's music to the ears of New Zealanders who were itching to get on a plane.

Travel Agents' Association president Brent Thomas said there was pent up demand for overseas travel.

"It has only a relatively small number of places people can stay at ... but we do know that there are New Zealanders that are definitely keen to head over to the Cook Islands," he said.

However Queenstown Mayor Jim Boulton said it would be a disaster.

"I would much rather travel bubbles in Australasia and the [Pacific] Islands be considered as one bubble applying to the Islands, Australia and New Zealand.

"That would give us the ability to get Australians coming here to replace the domestic market which will inevitably go to the Islands," he said.

Last week, Australia announced a one way travel bubble (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/427459/covid-19-australia-announces-trans-tasman-bubble-flights>) across the Tasman - New Zealanders will be able to visit New South Wales and the Northern Territory without quarantining from 16 October.

But the same will not apply here - anyone arriving in New Zealand must still complete two weeks of managed isolation.

Things are looking more optimistic for the Pacific - with no community transmission in Aotearoa for 11 days, the hopes of a Cook Islands travel bubble in time for the Christmas holidays remain alive and well.