

= Culture of the Cook Islands =

The culture of the Cook Islands reflects the traditions of its fifteen islands as a Polynesian island country, spread over 1 @, @ 800 @, @ 000 square kilometres (690 @, @ 000 sq mi) in the South Pacific Ocean . It is in free association with New Zealand . Its traditions are based on the influences of those who settled the islands over several centuries . Polynesian people from Tahiti settled in the Cook Islands in the 6th century . The Portuguese captain , Pedro Fernandes de Queirós , made the first recorded European landing in the islands in the early 17th century , and well over a hundred years later , in the 18th century , the British navigator , Captain James Cook arrived , giving the islands their current name . Missionaries developed a written language , bringing schools and Christianity to the Cook Islands in the early 19th century . Cook Islands M?ori , also known as M?ori K?ki ' ?irani or Rarotongan , is the country 's official language .

The Culture Division of the Cook Islands Government supports and preserves the country 's national heritage . One of the popular traditional dances of the Cook Islands is the Ura , a sacred ritual usually performed by a female who moves her body to tell a story , accompanied by intense drumming by at least five drummers . The craft of the locals can be seen in dresses , sarongs , and jewellery crafted with local products , such as shells , and an important practice among women is tivaevae , a type of quilting . Typical cuisine consumed in the Cook Island is fresh seafood such as octopus or clams , lamb or suckling pig , and fresh fruit , especially coconut . Rugby union and bowling are popular sports , and the islands hosted the 1986 Pacific Cup and the 1998 Polynesia Cup . The House of Ariki (Are Ariki) offers dignity but limited power to the ariki , historical chiefs in the islands ' social hierarchy .

= = Background = =

Polynesian settlers arrived from Tahiti in the 6th century . In 1606 , the Portuguese captain , Pedro Fernandes de Queirós , was the first European recorded as landing in the islands . Captain Cook , who gave the islands their current name , arrived in 1773 and 1777 . Missionaries from the early 1800s brought schools and Christianity , and developed a written language .

= = Social hierarchy = = =

Social hierarchy and tapu (sacred matters) in the Cook Islands was controlled by ariki (high chiefs) , with typically between three and six per island . Each ariki was a ruler of an ivi or ngati (tribe) . Lesser noble ranks in the social hierarchy were the mataiapo and rangatira (minor chiefs) . The chief 's control , which could neither be gained or lost , was established by his mana (power) , which derived from his birth , achievements and status . However , an ariki with declining popularity could be perceived to be lacking in mana , which might lead to a loss of social control .

Ariki controlled Ariki , mataiapo and rangatira titles continue to be passed down through family lines , and the associated ancient ceremonies and traditions continue to be practised in the present day . The House of Ariki (Are Ariki) , a parliamentary body in the Cook Islands , was established in 1967 . It is composed of high chiefs , with limited power .

Some women 's organisations , such as the Cook Islands National Council of Women and the Cook Islands Business and Professional Women 's Association , have difficulty separating themselves from national politics . The largest women 's organisations , Cook Islands Christian Church Ekalesia Vainetini , Dorcas , National Catholic Women 's League , and Women 's Harvesters , are affiliated with local churches .

= = Mythology , superstition and religion = =

Cook Islands mythology has commonality with Polynesian myths and legends . Avaiki is known as the land of the gods and ancestors . Prominent figures include Avatea , Ina , Marama , Nganaoa , Papa , Rongo , Tangaroa , Vaitakere , Varima te takere , and Vatea . A belief in the mystic power by

the use of incantations and charms or purepura (see witchcraft) was passed down through the generations . Tales of the supernatural and spirits is common practice in the islands by people of all generations and are used to explain many of the more unusual events . Tupapaku is woven into discussions on social relationships , proprietary rights , and historical events . Spirit shelters exist in the islands , typically made by children who weave them out of plantain stems .

The missionary , John Williams , was instrumental in the conversion of Cook Islanders to Christianity . He brought two Tahitian missionaries to Aitutaki in 1821 who converted the island 's population . A subsequent group of Polynesian missionaries went to Mauke and Atiu , while Mitiaro followed next in 1823 . Williams encountered difficulty in converting the population on Rarotonga whose tribes were divided under ariki (chiefs) and ta 'unga (priests) . Aaron Buzacott , a Congregationalist colleague of Williams , a central figure in the missionary work of the London Missionary Society in the South Seas , lived on Rarotonga between 1828 and 1857 . Takamoā Theological College , founded by Aaron Buzacott , trains pastors for the Cook Islands Christian Church , which is the nation 's largest religious denomination .

= = Language and literature = =

Cook Islands Māori , officially named Māori Kōki ' ōirani , and also known as Rarotongan , is the nation 's official language . There are several mutually intelligible dialects , spoken on the fifteen islands . Rakahanga @-@ Manihiki and Penrhyn are examples . The Cook Islands Maori Dictionary was eventually published in 1995 and included language studies by Dr. Jasper Base of the University of London (1957 ? 1985) , the compilation assistance of Raututi Taringa (1957 ? 1959) , and the works of an Advisory Committee which was established by Dr. Jasper Buse established in 1960 . Pukapukan developed in isolation on the island of Pukapuka and is considered by scholars as a distinct language .

Naming is a symbolic tradition of the islands ' Maori population . Names form a link not only to ancestors , descendents , and friends , but to titles and land , as well as events and relationships . Dreamed or created , name change are not limited to events , such as birth , marriage , and death , but can also occur in association with a bad omen . First names are interchangeable between men and women , while surnames can vary from person to person within a family unit .

Considering the relatively small size of the islands , it has a notable literary scene . Tuepokoina Utanga Morgan is credited with writing musical compositions and poetry and producing folk opera . Composer and poet Teate Makirere , who toured as communications adviser of the Pacific Conference of Churches , has been commended for his secular writings . Paiere Mokoroa and Merota Ngamata are known for their writings on the culture of Atiu Island and Pukapuka , and Tingota Simiona wrote an extensive collection of stories based on the legends of Atiu Island . One of the well @-@ known Cook Islands children 's story tellers and poets was Mona Matepi , who produced the Mokopets television series of 52 episodes for children . There is also a number of popular songs and dramas of unknown artists , presented on television and radio , which are available on cassettes and CDs . Radio programs in the islands are broadcast in the native language , English and Tahitian .

= = Music and dance = =

The music of the Cook Islands is characterised by heavy drums and ukuleles . Men perform the hura , which is the equivalent of the Hawaiian hula , locking their feet on the ground and keeping their shoulders steady . Drums form part of an ensemble . Performing groups include the Cook Islands National Arts Theatre , Arorangi Dance Troupe , Betela Dance Troupe , Akirata Folk Dance Troupe , and Te Ivi Maori Cultural Dance Troupe . Raro Records is the main specialist in music retail on the islands .

Dances are performed at multicultural festivals . One of the popular traditional dances of the Cook Islands is the Maori Ura , a sacred ritual usually performed by a female who moves her body to tell a story , accompanied by intense drumming by at least 5 drummers . Moving the hips , legs and hands

give off different gestures to the audience to tell a tale , typically related to the natural landscape such as the ocean and birds and flowers , but also feelings of love and sadness . The ura dance has three distinct components ; the ura pa 'u (drum dances) , korero (legends) and kaparima (action songs) . To perform the ura , women typically wear a pareu and a kikau (grass) skirt , with flowers and shell headbands and necklaces known as ei . Men during the dance are said to " vigorously flap their knees in a semi @-@ crouched position while holding their upper bodies steady " , and they typically wear kikau skirts and headbands . The drumming group , an integral part of the Ura , typically consists of a lead drummer (pate taki) , support lead (pate takirua) , a double player (tokere or pate akaoro) playing wooden gongs , and two other players playing skin drums (pa 'u and mango) . Travel writer David Stanley asserts that the finest performances of the Ura are put on in Rarotonga .

A sexually charged variant of the ura dance is known as the ura piani in which both men and women are involved in telling the story . Other variations include the ura rore (stilt dance) , ura tairiri (fan dance) , ura korare (spear dance) , and ura rama (torch dance) . Aside from the Ura dance and its components such as the korero and kaparima , there are several other genres of music and dance in the Cook Islands including dance dramas (peu tupuna) , religious pageants (nuku) , formal chants (pe 'e) , celebratory chants (' ute) , and polyphonic choral music (' imene tapu) . Like the ura , these are also often accompanied by drums .

= = Art = =

Local residents have developed their own style in clothing and jewellery , using local products , such as shells . Giving somebody a shell necklace and placing it around the recipients neck is a goodwill and love gesture . They make a type of sarong , called a pareu , which is typically brightly coloured . Like the other islands of Melanesia such as Fiji and Samoa , the Cook Islanders are known for their hand @-@ painted and silk @-@ screened dress fabrics . An important practice among women is tivaevae , a type of quilting .

The islanders have many fine carvers , especially at Michael Tavioni 's workshop and Island Craft , the latter of which produces items like spears and masks . Items are sold in places like Punanga Nui Market , Beachcomber Gallery and Bergman and Sons Crafts Store . Kenwalls Gallery displays paintings by local artists , and landscape artist Judith Kunzle sells her drawings and paintings in her home studio and several of the crafts stores , several of which have featured in numerous publications and postcards of the islands .

= = Cuisine = =

Due to the island location and the fact that the Cook Islands produce a significant array of fruits and vegetables , natural local produce , especially coconut , features in many of the dishes of the islands as does fresh seafood . While most food is imported from New Zealand , there are several Growers ' Associations , such as Mangaian , Ngatangia , Penrhyn , Puaikura , and Rakahanga , which contribute produce for local cuisine . Typical local cuisine includes arrowroot , clams , octopus , and taro , and seasonings such as fresh ginger , lime , lemon , basil , garlic and coconut . Rukau is a dish of taro leaves cooked with coconut sauce and onion . A meal of octopus is known locally as Eke , and suckling pig is known as Puaka . Ika mata is a dish of raw fish marinated with lemon or lime and served with coconut cream , while Pai Ika and Keke Ika are also local fish fare . Poke is a dessert which can be made in one of two ways , either with banana and coconut milk or with pawpaw . Soursop , oranges and mangos are popular as juices . Coconut water , local beer (Cooks Lager) , and coffee are popular beverages among the Cook Islanders .

= = Sports = =

Like in many of the other islands of the Pacific , Rugby Union is a popular sport . The Cook Islands national rugby union team began playing on the international stage in 1971 . Sevens rugby is also

played and has its own association , as does netball , sevens rugby , weightlifting and powerlifting , table tennis , Tae Kwon @-@ Do , and volleyball . The Cook Islands Round Cup is the top division of the Cook Islands Football Association and plays at the National Stadium among other venues .

Bowling is popular , and the Cook Islands have at least six clubs including Ikurangi Women 's Bowling Club , Parekura Men 's Bowling Club , Parekura Women 's Bowling Club , and Rarotonga Men 's Bowling Club . It is presided over by the Cook Islands Lawn Bowling Federation , and the Cook Islands Bowls Carnival Tour is organised annually . There are also various badminton , motorcycle , golf , racing , sailing , squash , and canoeing clubs .

On a broader scale , the Cook Islands Sports & Olympic Association , Rarotonga Amateur Athletics Association , Tauvaine Sports & Cultural Association , and Tupapa @-@ Maraerena Sports Association are notable associations . The Cook Islands Fisherman 's Association , Cook Islands Game Fishing Club , and the Ngatangia Fishermen 's Club support fishing enthusiasts . The country hosted the 1986 Pacific Cup and the 1998 Polynesia Cup .

= = Administration and preservation = =

Native antiquities , defined as " native relics , articles with ancient native tools and according to native methods , and all other articles or things of historical or scientific value or interest and relating to the Cook Islands " are protected by the Cook Islands Amendment Act 1950 . Cultural events are coordinated by the Cook Islands National Arts Council , which was established in 1985 by an Act of Parliament . The administrative mechanism was specially oriented towards promotion of culture of the islands and a Cultural Division was functional . In the late 1980s , the Prime Minister , Geoffrey Henry a keen enthusiast in promoting island 's culture , established a number of monuments and also created the Ministry of Cultural Development , he backed it up with financial resources . The activity got a boost because of creation of expressive arts , large influx of tourist into the island , and the knowledge assimilated and adopted by the islanders on the culture of the other regions . The Ministry of Cultural Development Act 1990 repealed the National Arts Council Act 1981 ? 82 and provided for the preservation and enhancement of the country 's cultural heritage , encouragement of its cultural art forms , and maintenance of the unique cultural national identity of its people .

The Cook Island Museum promotes the cultural heritage of the entire region including Pacific Islanders . It represents a large variety of material culture . The islands ' history , as well as its traditional techniques in dancing , fishing , weaving , woodcarving , medicine , and food preparation are also profiled at the Cook Islands Cultural Village .