

# CAFÉ

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Cafe & Restaurant Guide



Michael Guy returns to the Cook Islands, not to write a book about a controversial cancer therapist, but for more of a relaxing holiday

## Back to the Cook Islands

I was in 1971 when I was last in the Cook Islands, not for a working holiday as on this most recent occasion, but for two visits to write a book about the controversial cancer therapist named Milan Brych. Brych, a Czechoslovakian who had fled the country when the Russians invaded, had arrived in New Zealand where he managed to get registration as a doctor. His focus turned to terminal cancer patients, his alleged immunotherapy treatment using his own secret formula attracting worldwide attention.

After an investigation by Professor John Scott for the Medical Council finding that Brych's medical credentials were bogus, Brych moved to Australia where the redneck Premier Joh Bjelke-Peterson allowed him to set up practice until the Australian Government stepped in. The then Cook Islands Premier, Sir Albert Henry, saw the possibility of making a mountain of money out of Brych, and invited him to set up practice on Rarotonga.

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I traveled to Rarotonga twice to meet Brych, his side-kick, Melbourne doctor Warren Hastings, and some of his many patients who had terminal cancer and who had traveled from all over the world in the hope of being cured. The result of those trips was the book "Cancer & Milan Brych: Cure or Con?"

Thankfully the Cook Islands of my first visits has long-gone, no trace of the Brych regime remaining, apart from the gravestones in the cemetery of those patients now buried near the sound of the surf on the reef and in the shadow tall palm trees. But seeing the grave of Jarrod Nutt from Adelaide brought tears to my eyes. When I had last talked to Jarrod, just before he died on Rarotonga on a Christmas Eve, he was a happy bubbly boy whose head was extended from the big neuroblastoma tumour.

Jumping on my rented motorbike and heading back to my beach-front unit at The Rarotongan, my tears had dried within a kilometre. With that cathartic experience out of the way I was ready to relax. It's only 32 kilometres around the main island of Rarotonga so to get around most people rent a motorscooter for between \$15-\$20 a day. Otherwise for \$3 one way (\$5 return) you can get the bus, two of which are circling the island in opposite directions, running from 7am-4pm, and 6pm-11pm, except Sunday nights.

The Rarotongan Resort Hotel ([www.therarotongan.com](http://www.therarotongan.com)) is undoubtedly the best hotel to stay on the main island, right on a beautiful white beach, with a great pool, extremely good food in its various restaurants, snorkeling gear for diving and other activities

are free, and if you have children they have a great kid's club to give you some freedom. For couples wanting a touch of luxury without children around then head for the island of Aitutaki and The Aitutaki Lagoon Resort & Spa ([www.aitutakilagoonresort.com](http://www.aitutakilagoonresort.com)), recognized as one of the best resorts in the world.

My week in the Cook Islands ([www.cook-islands.com](http://www.cook-islands.com)) was spent reading, snorkeling, flying to Atiu to look at the coffee plantations and visit the Atiu coffee company, and riding around the island discovering its beauty and visiting cafes and restaurants. Having visited Hawaii, Tahiti and New Caledonia in the past few years, I'd have to say the Cook Islands is my favourite. Why? Because it's easy to get around, the scenery is stunning, and it's affordable because they use NZ currency so there are no exchange rate fluctuations.

### People of the Cook Islands –

#### Atiu Coffee Factory's Juergen Manske-Eimke

The Cook Islands has a thriving coffee growing industry, the only problem being that demand outstrips supply. In fact, after flying to the coffee-growing island of Atiu I had lunch at the only café there – Parua Tavioni's Terangi Nui Cafe, but the coffee they served was instant. "They have been growing coffee here on Atiu as long as people can remember," says the entrepreneurial Juergen Manske-Eimke. "It goes back to the late 1890s when



the missionaries planted it." When Juergen arrived in the Cook Islands, having worked as an economist in Africa for nine years, he found that the local coffee industry had collapsed. On the invitation of former Premier Tom Davis he took over reviving the industry, reestablishing the 38 acres of coffee plantations, and setting up the Atiu Coffee Factory to organically grow, 100% sun-dry, and roast the annual 5-ton coffee crop with a 15 kilo Probat roaster. Atiu coffee sells through local tourist outlets, to cafes, hotels and mail order clients, and some is exported to Tahiti. [www.adc.co.ck/coffee](http://www.adc.co.ck/coffee)

#### Caveman Marshall Humphrey

The best way to discover the island of Atiu is to take a tour with Marshall Humphreys. Marshall runs tours that cover the island's 27 square kilometers, visiting beaches, Captain Cook's landing, and the unique Anatakaitaki Caves. This is where the Kopeka bird – a swift - flies through total darkness, guiding themselves to their nesting sites by making clicking noises. [www.atiutoursaccommodation.com](http://www.atiutoursaccommodation.com)

#### Neil Dearlove at The Cook

Neil was a multi-media producer in Auckland who fell in love with the Cook Islands while on holiday. On the outskirts of the main town of Avarua he established the popular The Cook café, notable because it's here that he also



roasts his Paradiso blend coffee in a little 5 kilo roaster. The Cook is a daytime café where the food is simple and tasty – paninis, the Mai Mai coconut curry, waffles, a veggie burger, and cakes, brownies and the bread which they bake each day. Neil is planning to sell the café but continue roasting so if you want to retire in Paradise make him an offer!

#### Liz Raizis & The Rarotongan Resort

Despite a busy family life raising an 11-year old son, Liz is also Director of Marketing for the Cook Island's two most impressive resorts, The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa and the Aitutaki Lagoon Resort. "The Cook Islands will always be paradise," says Liz. "It hasn't changed much in 10 years, except we



have Wifi wireless internet by the pool, a few more parking signs, more tours and more boutique resorts. It won't get over-touristy because only Air New Zealand and Pacific Blue fly here, and seats are limited. "With the freedom of the islands, a stunning beach, and marine reserve teeming with rainbow coloured fish, visitors aren't held captive. They're here generally for a 7-10 day break because this is a destination that offers great value for money. You cannot beat Rarotonga as a place to get the best value for your holiday spend. And it's a great place for honeymooners, people wanting to get married, people who want to travel on their own, and even older couples because there are some very luxurious smaller resorts. [www.therarotongan.com](http://www.therarotongan.com) and [www.aitutakilagoonresort.com](http://www.aitutakilagoonresort.com)

#### Sue Carruthers & Tamarind House

Born near the coffee-growing area of Thika in Kenya, Sue Carruthers sailed from Capetown in a 32-foot yacht she and her husband built.



She fell in love with the Cook Islands and moved to Rarotonga permanently in 1983. "I wanted to paint but restaurants took over," she recalls. She opened Portofino restaurant, then established The Flame Tree, and in 2004 - with partner and chef Robert Brown



- she opened Tamarind House, a beautiful old colonial home that was once the residence for managers of the Union Steamship Company. Just a couple of minutes from Avarua, it has one of the best restaurant settings on earth, shaded under tall palm trees and looking over the ocean and the reef. Tamarind House very successfully manages to be a casual bar and café through to offering fine dining by night. My main course of Mahi Mahi on potato and julienne vegetables, with rukau (local spinach), and lemon hollandaise was the single best dish I enjoyed in the Cook Islands. Three editions of Sue's "The Tropical Garden Cookbook", containing some wonderful tropical recipes from the South Pacific, have now been published. Avarua, Ph. 26487

#### Shannon & Vaima

Right on its own little beach with fantastic views, Vaima has been lauded by the Lonely Planet Guide, and even the NZ Listener for its island fare. It has a lovely ambience with soft lighting, they play Polynesian music all the

time, and the food is strongly local – Seafood chowder, Ika Mata with yellow fin tuna marinated in lemon and coconut, or Grilled broadbill served with pawpaw, coriander, lime and sweet chili salsa. If you're staying not too far away they will pick you up from your hotel. Tel. 26123.

#### Tony Bullivant & Salsa

New Zealand chef Tony Bullivant and his wife Kelly run Salsa, buying it after two previ-



ous owners found it tough going. Now it's a gem, the piece de resistance the wood-fired pizza oven where everything from the pizzas to the seafood and vegetables are cooked. The ambience is casual, you can sit inside or out, the coffee isn't too bad, but for great local seafood - marlin, broadbill and superlative big eye yellow fin tuna – it's fantastic. For brunch try the Smoked marlin hash with chives topped with poached eggs and lime hollandaise. Salsa is an internet hotspot, open daily from 7.30am but closed evenings, and it's also a good spot just to sit in the courtyard and enjoy a beer. Downtown Avarua. Tel. 22215

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