






 **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**




Prepared by WDP Cook Islands







March 7th, 2025






“I Made You Wonderful”






Country Background Script





Country Overview	
Geography	Photo/Copyright
<p>The Cook Islands consist of 15 islands scattered over 2 million square kilometers within the Pacific Ocean. Out of the 15 islands, 12 are inhabited.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1</p>  <p>Cook Islands Map © Peter Hermes Furian</p>
<p>The capital of the Cook Islands is Rarotonga, a volcanic island with a population of 10,040 (of 15,040 total people). Many Cook Islanders now live abroad in New Zealand (approximately 80,000) and Australia (approximately 20,000).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p>  <p>Volcanic rock in Rarotonga © WDPIC</p>
History	Photo/Copyright
<p>The 15 islands that are now called Cook Islands were first thought to have been inhabited between 500-800 A.D., by people from islands in what is now known as French Polynesia.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p>  <p>Polynesian outfit © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p>Polynesians are thought to have migrated from Asia starting in 1500 B.C. Cook Islanders are true Polynesians, connecting directly back to the finest seafarers of the Pacific.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p>  <p>Ships © David Riley</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">5</p>  <p>Vaka Polynesian Canoe © WDPIC</p>




<p>Oral history tells that the island of Avaiki (thought to be Ra’iatea in the Society Islands) was the “mother of the lands” and the origin of the Polynesian people. Ru was a young explorer living in Avaiki, who loved to discover new islands.</p> <p>Ru made landfall on the island now known as Aitutaki. All the district chiefs today can trace their ancestry to the 20 royal virgins who came with Ru.</p>	<p>6</p>	 <p>Illustration of Ru © David Riley</p>
<p>The first record of Europeans in the Cook Islands came in the late 16th century with the Spanish explorer, Álvaro de Mendaña, sighting the island of Pukapuka on August 20, 1595. Another Spaniard, Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, stopped for provisions in Rakahanga on March 2, 1606. After this, there is no further record of European contact for 150 years. The British explorer, Captain James Cook came to the islands in his expeditions of 1773 and 1777. Despite the islands eventually carrying the great navigator’s namesake, Captain Cook only went ashore on the then uninhabited island of Palmerston.</p> <p>Captain Cook had named the group the Hervey Islands, after a British Lord of the Admiralty, but they were renamed Cook Islands, in honor of the great explorer, some 50 years later by the Russian cartographer, Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern.</p>	<p>7</p>	 <p>Captain Cook's ship (Endeavor) - Painting by Samuel Atkins (1787-1808) © Public Domain</p>
<p>Education</p>		<p>Photo/Copyright</p>
<p>Education has always been important in our Cook Islands society, and it serves to unite and strengthen our country.</p> <p>Education in the Cook Islands has close ties with the educational</p>	<p>8</p>	 <p>Apii Arorangi School © Arorangi Schools</p>


<p>for educational and work opportunities abroad.</p> <p>Church, sports and school are the greatest support networks for our young people through the Cook Islands, where they often turn for help and support.</p>	 <p>Young girls at church © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p>Child mortality rates in the Cook Islands have been declining over recent decades, and now have the lowest child mortality rates in the Pacific. However, the figures hide disparities within the remote outer islands with significantly higher rates of under-5 deaths.</p>	<p>13</p>  <p>Young child © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p>Arts & Culture</p> <p><i>Pandanus</i> (screwpine) and <i>rito</i> (coconut leaf fiber) are the main natural fibers that women in the Cook Islands use for weaving. <i>Pandanus</i> is used to weave mats, baskets, hats, fans, and table mats.</p> <p><i>Rito</i> is very unique in our weaving, although a few other Pacific islands use it, too. <i>Rito</i> is mainly used by women in the Northern Group Islands for weaving hats, fans, earrings, bags, purses, traditional costumes, and dance costumes.</p> <p><i>Rito</i> comes from the coconut tree, which Cook Islanders call “the tree of life.”</p>	<p>Photo/Copyright</p> <p>14</p>  <p>Weaving With Natural Fibers © WDPIC</p> <p>15</p>  <p>Handmade rito hat © WDPIC</p> <p>16</p>  <p>Rito weaving © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p><i>Ei katu</i> is a garland of flowers worn around the head, and it is also known as a flower crown or head garland. <i>Ei katu</i> is made by Cook Islands women and young girls. It is worn by both females and males as a symbol of love and belonging.</p>	<p>17</p>  <p>Ei katu (Flower garland) © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>

<p>It is a circle, which means that everything is connected.</p> <p>When presented as a gift, ei katu represents an embrace of love.</p>	18	 <p>Ei katu (Flower garland) © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p><i>Ei pupu</i> are shell leis made on the island of Mangaia. These leis are very difficult to make. The process involves women spending long hours among rocks after rain showers, picking up little yellow snail shells. The shells are cooked and dried, then drilled with holes and threaded on a fishing line.</p>	19	 <p>Ei pupu (Mangaia shell leis) © WDPIC</p>
<p><i>Tivaevae</i> (also spelled <i>tivaivai</i>) is the art of making handmade patchwork quilts. It was introduced by missionaries' wives, and transformed into an art form that is celebrated throughout the Cook Islands.</p>	20	 <p>Tivaevae © WDPIC</p>
<p>The Cook Islands is a nation rich in history, culture and heritage. To commemorate the August 4th birthday of Cook Islands as an independent nation, an annual event is held, called the <i>Te Maeva Nui Festival</i>. This is a week-long cultural celebration of Cook Islands arts, crafts, music, song, dance and local food. Our people and culture are our greatest assets, and the whole nation comes to a standstill as we celebrate our unique culture during this festival.</p>	21	 <p>Traditional dancers © Cook Islands Tourism (not to be used on items for sale)</p>
<p>Land</p>		<p>Photo/Copyright</p>
<p>The Cook Islands are in an enviable position where most people own and live off the riches of their own land. Cook Islanders are proud to be wonderful caretakers of their family tribal land.</p>	22	 <p>Food - fresh fruits © WDPIC</p>




<p>The “land tenure system” was established through the Cook Islands Act of 1915, which stipulated that native land could not be bought or sold, except to the government for public purposes. Instead, all native land would be passed to the children of Cook Islanders. Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu follow this Act of 1915, though the rest of the islands use the tribal system.</p>	<p>23</p>	 <p>Land with Fruit Trees © WDPIC</p>
<p>Tourism</p>		<p>Photo/Copyright</p>
<p>The Cook Islands has more than 800 accommodation providers, including backpacker hostels, family home stays, self-catering villas and luxury hotels.</p> <p>Key tourism attractions include coral reefs and atolls, sandy lagoon beaches, forests, waterfalls, volcanic peaks and cultural events displaying local music, song, dance, and food.</p> <p>In the Cook Islands, tourism is often described as being both a blessing and a curse. Tourism brings both advantages and disadvantages for the residents of the country.</p>	<p>24</p> <p>25</p> <p>26</p>	 <p>Thatch roof huts on beach© WDPIC</p>  <p>Tourist beach sign © WDPIC</p>  <p>Shells in turtle bowl © WDPIC</p>
<p>The Cook Islands’ first international airport opened in 1973 on the island of Rarotonga. Tourists began to arrive in significant numbers soon after. Before the opening of the airport, agriculture represented the main industry of the country, but tourism is now the main industry.</p>	<p>27</p>	 <p>Rarotonga Airport © WDPIC</p>







Christianity		Photo/Copyright
<p>The Gospel was brought to the Cook Islands in 1821 through the London Missionary Society (LMS) by John Williams. Christianity was accepted first in the island of Aitutaki by the Paramount Chief, Tamatoa Ariki.</p> <p>The missionaries attempted to suppress the singing, dancing and drumming of the Cook Islands inhabitants. However, this was the cultural heritage of the islands, and eventually, Cook Islanders found a way to beautifully blend their Polynesian heritage with their Christian faith.</p>	<p>28</p> <p>29</p>	 <p>John Williams and LMS plaque – Aitutaki ©WDPIC</p>  <p>Church altar with Polynesian canoe © WDPIC</p>
<p>In 1839, the Takamoā Theological College was established in Rarotonga to train mostly locals in theological studies, leading to a large number of pastors and church leaders in the Cook Islands. This college is the second oldest institution in the Cook Islands for theological study.</p> <p>Today, the Cook Islands is a majority Christian nation, where the people are driven by a strong sense of community and cultural values that come from their belief in God. In 1968, the Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council was set up to advise the government and traditional leaders on key issues affecting the social, economic and cultural development affairs of the people of the Cook Islands.</p>	<p>30</p>	 <p>Takamoā Theological College - sign © WDPIC</p>
<p>Christians in the Cook Islands come together annually for ecumenical prayer.</p> <p>We seek God's protection over our nation during the cyclone season,</p>	<p>31</p>	 <p>WDP 2024 worship service in Cook Islands©WDPIC</p>

<p>and we offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's continuous protection and blessings over our beautiful Cook Islands. How unique and wonderful it is when we come together in prayer and worship.</p> <p>There was a great celebration in 2021 by the people of Aitutaki, marking 200 years of Christianity in the Cook Islands.</p>	<p>32</p> <p>33</p>	 <p>Tsunami evacuation sign © WDPIC</p>  <p>1823-2023 CICC plaque – 200 years of Christianity © WDPIC</p>
<p>Women</p>	<p>Photo/Copyright</p>	
<p>The diverse roles undertaken by our women are significant in contributing to the fabric of our Cook Islands societies. Each congregation/ekalesia define their leadership roles as required.</p> <p>The <i>Ariki</i> are a group of hereditary paramount chiefs of noble rank in Polynesia. Each island in the Cook Islands is ruled by a group of <i>Ariki</i>, whose status comes not just from birth, but also from their achievements and respect within the community.</p>	<p>34</p>	 <p>Cook Islands Ariki ©Public Domain</p>
<p>We celebrate Cook Islands women in business who are established authors, poets, artists, photographers, jewelers, carvers and designers of unique apparel fabrics (TAV's). Exhibitions, fashion shows and presentations are held locally and internationally to promote these products.</p> <p>Women stall holders and their families sell their products at the renowned Punanga Nui Market in Rarotonga</p>	<p>35</p> <p>36</p>	 <p>Colorful scarves © WDPIC</p>  <p>Punanga Nui Market © WDPIC</p>
<p>Health</p>	<p>Photo/Copyright</p>	

<p>Free health care is provided to all students until the age of 18, and for all pensioners aged 60 years and above.</p> <p>There is a shortage of doctors to maintain high coverage in the workforce, with a shortage of skilled nurses. Medical care is often referred on to New Zealand.</p> <p>The Cook Islands did not escape the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. International border restrictions meant that the Cook Islands suffered economically and socially. Local Puna clinics provided accessible primary health care within the villages, with nurse practitioners onsite and doctors alternating between each one.</p>	37	 <p>Rarotonga Hospital © WDP Cook Islands</p>
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WORLD DAY OF PRAYER – COOK ISLANDS

History		Photo/Copyright
<p>The first service of World Day of Prayer (WDP) service was held on the island of Rarotonga in 1971. WDP was brought to the Cook Islands by the late Mrs. Akaiti Ama of the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), who also became the patroness for WDP Cook Islands for many years.</p>	38	 <p>1972 Journal © WDPIC</p>
<p>Since 1972, each church has taken turns in hosting the World Day of Prayer service, a practice that continues today.</p>	39	 <p>WDP 2022 service in Cook Islands © WDPIC</p>
<p>In 1990, WDP Cook Islands formed a committee with a total of 13 women from 6 different denominations: CICC, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ</p>	40	 <p>WDP Women from Aitutaki © WDPIC</p>
<p>Church, the Church of Jesus Christ</p>	41	

<p>of Latter-Day Saints, Assembly of God and the Apostolic Church.</p>		 <p>WDP Cook Islands Facebook page © WDPIC</p>
<p>Mrs. Rebecca Akaruru (from the Catholic Church) was nominated to attend the WDPIC International Meeting in Jamaica from July 28-August 6, 1990. At that meeting, Mrs. Akaruru was elected to be an alternate Regional Representative on the WDPIC Executive Committee for the Pacific region.</p>	<p>42</p>	 <p>1990 WDPIC Executive Committee - Rebecca Akaruru (bottom row, 2nd from the right) © WDPIC</p>
<p>Today</p>		
<p>The WDP service continues to be an annual event in Rarotonga and the Pa Enua (the islands other than Rarotonga).</p> <p>Our current WDP Cook Islands committee organized a Writer Workshop in August, 2022, to launch the writing process for the 2025 program. The group continues working together to prepare for upcoming programs, especially 2025.</p>	<p>43</p> <p>44</p>	 <p>WDP Cook Islands Committee © WDPIC</p>  <p>WDP Cook Islands Writer Workshop © WDPIC</p>
<p>In 2017, the Cook Islands was fortunate again when the late Mrs. Henrica Nio Marona was elected at the WDPIC International Meeting in Brazil to serve as the Pacific Regional Representative. She served in this role until her passing in 2021.</p>	<p>45</p> <p>46</p>	 <p>2019 WDPIC Executive Committee © WDPIC</p>  <p>WDPIC Pacific Regional Reps - Vicki Marney (left) Henrica Marona (right) 2019 © WDPIC</p>
<p>The Artwork & Artists</p>		<p>Photo/Copyright</p>

“Wonderfully Made”

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“Wonderfully Made” © WDPIC

The lagoons and oceans are bountiful with sea life, fish and gems (like black pearls), which link us to the world.

On each island, the mighty coconut tree stands tall, a symbol of strength and goodness. The coconut tree provides for our health and well-being.

We are grateful for the arrival of Christianity to our shores 200 years ago. Christianity brought hope, peace and light, with an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our precious Tivaevae quilts represent patience, love and unity. We honor God’s love and mercy with hats we wear to church, woven by skillful loving hands from the strands of rito, the young coconut leaf. We adorn ourselves with sweet scented Tiare tropical flowers, made into crowns and garlands.

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Tevairangi Napa (left), Tarani Napa (right) © WDPIC

Tarani Napa and Tevairangi Napa are a Mother-Daughter artist team from the Cook Islands. They feel honored to have been able to share this piece of artwork in recognition of their love for their home, their faith and, and their heritage. Tarani Napa is a mother of six children and three grandchildren. She is a certified primary school teacher, entrepreneur and creative artist. Tevairangi Napa is the eldest daughter of Tarani, and she is a proud mum of two children. She follows in her mother’s footsteps as a creative artist.

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For further information, please contact:

World Day of Prayer International Committee

475 Riverside Drive Room 729

New York, NY. 10115. USA

admin@worlddayofprayer.net - <http://worlddayofprayer.net>