

Avaru geographic locations

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Avarua might be a town on a tiny South Pacific island, but it won't feel too out-of-place to your usual bustling urban experience. This cool little capital is brimming with museums, art galleries and eateries and is where much of Rarotonga's remaining historical sites can be found. So plan a day exploring the Cook Islands' capital with this list of the best things to do in Avarua.

Before we begin, you might like to see the sights mentioned as part of a guided experience with Cook Islands Tours. Their 'Avarua Historical Walking Tour' gives a lot more depth to the sights of Avarua from a local's perspective. Check out the tour, read reviews and book tickets on Viator or Tripadvisor.

A must-do in Avarua is the unmissable Punanga Nui Market. It's the place to be on a Saturday morning with its array of tropical produce, smoothies and other treats at the food stalls, while pareu (sarongs), island shirts and black pearl jewellery make for fun souvenirs. See how it compares to other markets in the 5 Best Markets in Rarotonga & the Cook Islands.

A grand limestone building on the waterfront of Avarua's eastern shores, the Beachcomber Building not only offers a flair of history but it packs in a few reasons to visit. Browse local crafts and black pearls at The Beachcomber Store, browse inspiring local art at the Bergman Gallery and enjoy the quirky setting of The Cafe and the 'Vinyl Revival Club'.

Either admire "The Boiler" poking out of the ocean from shore at Trader Jacks or swim out to the 100+-year-old ship yourself. Caution: Only strong swimmers with fins and snorkelling gear should make the journey - and at low tide with other people. The swim is about 500m (1,600ft) from shore. Learn more about the history of the wreck in the 10 Best Historical Sites on Rarotonga.

Avarua has no lack of museums, starting with the Cooks Island National Museum. Browse carved artefacts, seafaring vaka replicas, traditional tivaevae linen and learn more about their cultural and historical significance through the information text on the walls. The museum is open Monday to Friday, from 8am to 4pm, and has a small admission fee. What's more, it makes for an excellent rainy day activity.

Yes, this is a different museum in Avarua but it's not too far away from the one previously mentioned. Set in park grounds surrounded by some of Avarua's oldest buildings, the Cook Islands Library & Museum displays interesting ceremonial artefacts, cooking utensils, shells and weapons. Outside you'll see some of the museum's maritime displays such as vaka and an anchor. Their library also holds a collection of rare books. Find the museum open from 9am to 1pm, Monday to Saturday, and from 4pm to 7pm on Tuesday evenings.

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Also departing from the Avatiu Harbour, several fishing charters await to take you out in the morning (when the fish strike best) and in the afternoon (so, you know, you can lie in). Either hire the charter to yourselves or join a shared charter for your chance to reel in the South Pacific's pelagics, such as wahoo, yellowfin tuna, mahimahi and even marlin. Check out your options in the 10 Best Fishing Charters on Rarotonga.

Ok, so there are many foodie delights in Avarua between cafes like The Lucky Rooster and Kai & Co. – not to mention the food trucks! But for something a little different, head to Cooks Fudge Factory. Just behind the bus stop, Cooks Fudge Factory offers free tastings of their deliciously creamy creme brulee, Irish cream, Raro lamington, rocky road and more creative fudge flavours. They won't be offended if you ask for more!

A multi-storey building kept in prime condition at the foothills of Avarua, Takamoa Mission House or Takamoa Theological College was completed in 1843. It was the first college for training indigenous missionaries of the London Missionary Society in the Pacific. An interpretation panel at the entrance of the grounds tells the story of the college.

Opposite the prominent CICC Church stands the historic Pare O Tane Palace of Makea and the surrounding Taputapuatea Marae. The grounds are open to the public, encouraging you to admire this grand building that has been renovated throughout the years. Stand on the grounds where the paramount ariki (chief) of the area, Makea Takau, signed the treaty accepting the Cook Islands as a British protectorate in 1888.

A surprisingly decent hub for shopping, Avarua can scratch the retail itch with its fashion stores, black pearl boutiques, souvenir outlets and more. Get yourself a tailored island shirt at Tuki's Pareu, admire black pearls farmed in the Cook Islands at Bergman & Sons, browse all sorts of Pacific wares at Island Crafts and Mareko Island Creations. If you're unsure whether something is local, don't be afraid to ask; shop clerks will tell you (and are usually honest).

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