

Travel

LIFESTYLEASIA

Moai for
Inland at
Tongariki, rest
by archaeol
Claudio Cri



Ahu Tonga

Perched on the hillside of Rano Raraku are unusual Moais scattered about and partially buried to their shoulders in the spoil from the quarry



ENIGMATIC EASTER ISLAND

ONE OF THE MOST REMOTE AND SPARSELY INHABITED PLACES ON EARTH HOLDS A MYSTERY THAT HAS DRAWN TRAVELERS AND ADVENTURERS FOR CENTURIES

By CECILY MABASA

ISLA DE PASCUA, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS RAPA NUI OR EASTER ISLAND, has intrigued adventurers for centuries. Despite many tourists and travelers reaching the remote location in the Pacific Ocean in recent years, the island has kept its charm and mystery, mainly because of the famous stone-faced structures. A personal desire to see the place first took root in childhood and developed well into the adult years. When the opportunity to visit presented itself recently, it was impossible to pass up.

From Santiago, Chile, the plane flew over one of the longest stretches of water in the world. It took five hours but the few thousand miles of air travel seemed like a journey towards the edge of the planet. The island's enigmatic appeal was heightened even further surrounded by this endless expanse of blue ocean.

The allure lay mostly on the gigantic Moai structures scattered around the island. There have been many theories raised by everyone from scientists and nature conservationists to casual tourists about these massive stoneworks; from being part of a tribal ritual to the work of aliens or extraterrestrials. Despite extensive studies by historians and archaeologists, the mystery of these granite giants has never been fully explained.

WHERE TO STAY

Other than the enigmatic presence of the centuries old monoliths, there were the other enjoyments afforded by the island. The eco-friendly Explora Lodge added to the overall experience. It had continental gourmet food or an option for a taste specific menu. All of the lodges under Explora, including this one in Easter Island, adapt an architectural

Rapa Nui lodge



design to the environs. Each is particularized to blend with the surroundings and maximize the natural climate.

Accommodations during this stay was a pine wood-panelled room, equipped with hydrotherapy tubs and excellent views of the Pacific Ocean. More pampering services are offered at the Hare Taheta spa with therapeutic massages using various essentials oils. It was a good sequel after a day of hiking around the island. There was also a solar-heated Jacuzzi and an infinity pool to lounge by just as the sun went down.

WHAT TO DO

Remote islands usually conjure images of virginal golden sand, but people don't go there for the beaches. Activities arranged by Explora Lodge allow a deeper understanding of the culture and geography of Easter Island. The lodge encourages guests to do the Moai explorations on foot instead of going around

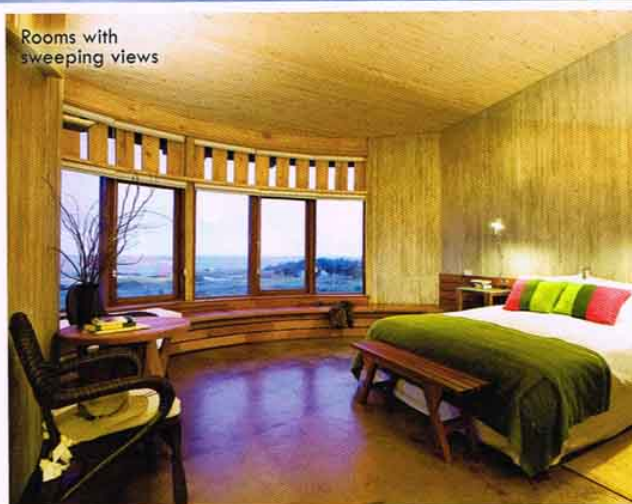
The best way to relax after a long day exploring the island



in buses. Paths were created just for this. Each day, guests can choose from a menu of adventures. The walks can go as long as four hours, and each trek leads to different points in the island. There are also cycling and kayaking tours with graduating levels of difficulty. Explora Lodge provides top-of-the-line bicycles, kayaks and other equipment for these trips.

A few things became evident during a tour around

Rooms with sweeping views

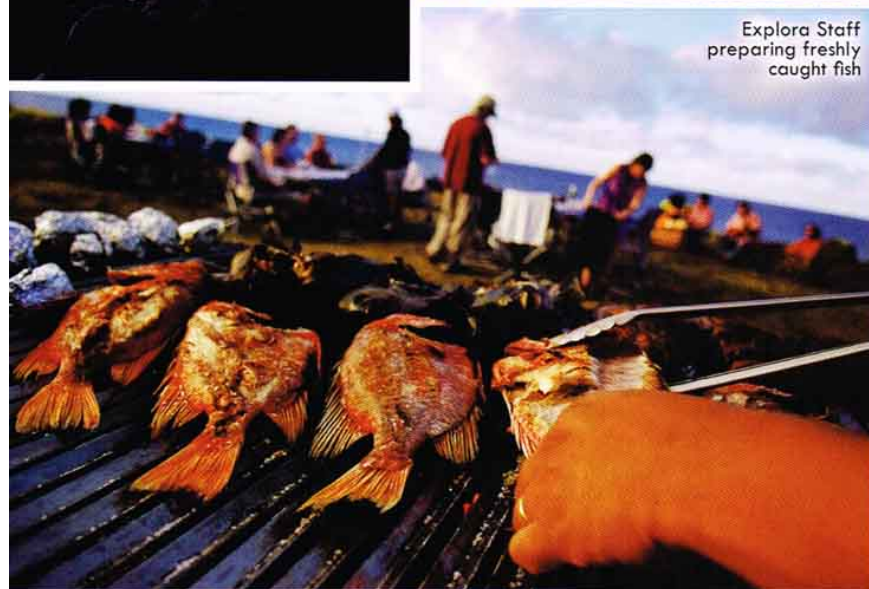


ing out to explore
and on foot

Picnic Lunch the
Explora Way



Explora Staff
preparing freshly
caught fish



Locals entertain
visitors during dinner



the island. The statues were facing different directions and some, like the Moais along the quarries of the Rano Raraku volcano, were left standing while the ones along the coastline are laid down facing the sky. While some of the Moais have headpieces, all the structures are basically identical.

Contemplating the phenomenon, I realized why the theories extended to superhuman races and extra-terrestrials. The heavy, 30-foot stone faces are so overwhelmingly huge that it is difficult to imagine the process of creating these primitive sculptures hundreds of years ago without the technology available today. Despite all the research done before the trip, it was still awe-inspiring to actually gaze up on them in person. Although the mystery attracts adventure-seekers, it is advised to simply keep the questions unanswered. There were questions before the plane landed, and there were plenty more as the plane departed, but a childhood curiosity had been satisfied during that visit to Easter Island. □

When to go: Avoid May, the island's wettest month. Arrangements for this trip were made with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations. For more information, phone (917) 8687971 or visit <seatosummitadv.net> or email <ces@seatosummitadv.net>