



TAKURUA

O 'AVAIKI-RARO, 'AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI
FOOD & FEASTS OF THE COOK ISLANDS





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'Takurua' is a Cook Islands Tourism Corporation initiative which aims to see the development and documentation of our local, traditional cuisine and sharing our cuisine and flavours with the world. This publication draws on the history and connection of Takurua to our people in the Cook Islands. Written and produced by Makiuti Tongia with contributions from Professor Jon Jonassen and Ruteru Taripo.

CONNECTIONS TO EVERYTHING MAORI

The *takurua* is about food resources, food management, environmental management and people. It is about Maori values of sharing food and showing 'consideration' for others in the community that are or will be less fortunate. It is about taking care of the soil and the sea so that we do not pollute them to such a stage where they are poisoned. A poisoned soil and sea is a poisoned people.

Takurua celebrates the wise management of our food resources. It commemorates thanksgiving to God for the protection, provision and sharing of free food resources – physical and spiritual. Takurua is a time of acknowledging the community for their efforts in sustaining food resources. It is a time of celebrating the community's time tested traditional methods of food management.

Takurua is connected to every aspect of Maori life from the cradle to the grave. It serves the birth of a child to baptism, first birthday, marriage and death. *Takurua* is our life story. It is the story of our Maori life and our relationship with our food resources and our marine and terrestrial environments.



A JOURNEY INTO THE REALM OF THE TAKURUA OF AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA AND MANAVANUI

Kia Orāna, Kia Orāna, Kia Orāna tātou kātōatoa
Turōu, Nau mai, Tau mai, 'Ano mai, Kake mai
Kake mai ki runga i teia Vaka no te TERE'ANGA TAKURUA
O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI

Kake atūra, kua tata, kua ni'a i te atua
i te take o Maungaroa
Ki ō te pito-'enua o Tinomana Ariki
Kua 'ārikiriki 'ia mai, kua 'iri'iri 'ia mai 'e ngā Ta'unga i runga i
tōna paepae,
Kua taka'i i tōna Marae tapu, kua kai i ngā kōrero tupuna
o Tinomana Ariki ma tōna matakeinanga
Kiriti atūra te Ta'unga i te tapu mana o runga i te Marae
kia noa le...koko! " 'Aere... 'Aere... 'Aere ra kia manuia"

Kimi'ia, ranga'ia, tango'ia kia vai te Kōrero Tapu
te Kōrero Mana o te TAKURUA
O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI
Teia, teia ta tātou i mā'ora'ora mai
I te 'Are Karioi ka kai ei i te Kōrero, i te muna, i te mana
i te tataranga, i te kakara 'ē te reka o te Mānga Māori
Kua mone, kua nanave, kua 'ā'ā...?

Kua pō o te ao, kua ao o te pō
'Aere atu ki roto-'enua, ki ngā peka 'au o te ō
Kiā Rongo, kiā Tāne
Kua takai i te vari, kua 'uri i te one,
Aue... 'e miri 'ē tūmā te tū ruperupe
Teia, tē vai nei, te tū mai ra te ariki 'Ūtū o Takuvaine
'E 'akakite'anga o te ropi'anga karape ā te 'ui-tupuna
No te KĪ O TE 'ENUA

*Greetings, greetings, and Hello to everyone here
Welcome, welcome, come, Come on board
Come on board the Vaka for a Journey of the Feast of Avaiki
Raro, Avaiki Vaenga, Manavanui*

*The journey started, going up, getting closer to the gods on the
mountain of Maungaroa at the fortress of Tinomana Ariki.
All were welcomed by the Ta'unga, and adorned with garlands
of ei on the paepae.*

*A Takai Marae was performed on the Marae Tapu, the history
of Tinomana Ariki and the site was foretold.
The sacred Tapu on the Marae was finally lifted allowing it to
become free and noa
le...koko! "Go... Go, walk on the ground... Go and Good luck"*

*Look for it, search it, grasp it so this valuable and sacred infor-
mation, the prestigious traditional knowledge of
the TAKURA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA,
MANAVANUI may live on*

*Here, the journey continued into the Are Karioi. Dialogue,
deliberation and food were shared
Unraveled knowledge of Mānga Māori, with its intimacy and
mana unraveled some significance, its aroma and the won-
derful tastes and then...?*

*The day became night, the night became day
Into the hub of the island, to the wild hibiscus valley of Rongo,
of Tāne, the visit continued. Walked the mud, turned the soil
Aue... touched it, so many exquisite growth
Here, they are in splendor, there majestically stands the king
of the 'ŪTŪ of Takuvaine valley
To remind of the being and ability of ancestors with the Riches
of the Land*

Kua 'aere atu ki o Tangaroa
Ki te 'oionu'anga o te moana
Tākiri, e tākiri atu i tētahi 'akairo no te KI O TE MOANA
Kāre 'a Tangaroa i pā mai
'Auē e...tau...ē!!
Pēnei, kua tā'iri ki te tau, ki te Arāpō Korekoreta'i
Noātu rā...!

Rōtai'anga Tumu-Kōrero
Ka 'uri'uri, ka 'ātuitui, ka kōrero
Ka 'akatakapātoa, ka 'Iri'irikāpua
i te Tāpura tuata'i
TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI

Teia te mana Poū-Toru o te Ipukarea
Ngā tā'okota'i 'anga o te 'enua
Neke ē neke, 'Urimuri e 'uriario,
Kapurunga, kapuraro
Tēnā, tērā, teia, kai 'ē kai
Kai 'ē kai i te uare, i te roimata o te 'ui-tupuna
Kia vai te meka, te ruperupe, te rito, te mone
TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI
Ta te 'ui-tupuna i vaio mai

'Iri'iri 'ia tō'ou upoko ki te kakara
o te tiare māori 'ē te maire
Ko'iko'ia mai te karape, te pakari o te 'ui-tupuna
Ki roto i tā'au raurau akaputuputu'anga
I reira ka to'itoi mutukore atu ei i te nakunaku'anga
Ki roto rava i tō'ou manava
Ko TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAV-
ANUI
'E ora'anga mou, e ora'anga motukore,
'e ora'anga tiratiratū, 'e ora'anga mana
Nō'ou, nōna, nōku 'ē nō tātou
Kia mā'ara ko ta tātou au mānga pu'apinga rava atu i te ora'anga
nei'E tūtakikore.

*Visited Tangaroa
At a site on its the deep ocean
Fished and fished for a catch
from the Riches of the Sea
Tangaroa did not grant
'Auē e... tau ē!!
Maybe, a mix-up with the season, the Arāpō
Korekoreta'i Even so...!*

*Assembling of selected Tumu Kōrero
To present, discuss, debate, deliberate,
and connect the premeditated topics of traditional foods
TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI.*

*Also present, were leaders of the nation
Organizations on the island
Moving about, turning to the back,
turning to the front, looking upwards
There, there, there you have it, eat and eat
Eat the saliva, words, the tears of the ancestors
And let the growth, the lush and abundant, the superb flavour and
sweetness of TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA,
MANAVANUI let them live and flourish*

*Adorn thine head with the fragrance
of the tiare Māori and the Maire
Gather the skills, and the wisdom
of the ancestors
In your raurau of collections*

*And then engrave there forever
the thoughts
Deep in your heart, that
TE TAKURUA O AVAIKI RARO, AVAIKI VAENGA, MANAVANUI
is a life of good harvest, and everlasting,
a life of respect, excellence and mana
For you, and you, for me and for all of us
And also remember that our most important food in our lives is
Free*





TAKURUA

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HISTORY

The word **takurua** captures the history of our Maori people. We have settled in the Cook Islands for over 1,200 years. That is how long the **takurua** probably is. It is a feast, a time of communal sharing and celebration of food with one another. It is the finale of 'food ceremonies' that highlight Maori or indigenous aspects of central importance.

Our ancestors brought the **takurua** in their travels across the sea and adapted them to their new environments. They kept the feasts that were relevant in their new land, as tributes to their God for keeping the people alive and united.

Other ancestors did the same. Ceremonies of the *poi taro*, *poi meika mangeo*, *poi pia Maori*, *ma'i* fermented breakfruit and ti toffee (cordyline) were introduced to the **takurua** through many investitures of people with a chiefly status. Other ancestors brought many additional plants like the taro, kumara and yam, and the fruits of the coconut tree for the new lands. They further brought new animals like the pigs and chickens to domesticate and supplement their diet in the new lands. Our forefathers applied their knowledge to their new environments and even adapted this knowledge to suit their environment in order to survive. As a result, the concept and essence of Takurua has continued to transition in order to make it relevant to present day setting.

Today, we celebrate the **takurua** in its new form while acknowledging its origins.

Takurua captures the adventurous spirit of the people past and present. It has kept some of our values and given direction, providing purpose and an identity to our people. The **takurua** feast was their metaphor. It identified who they were with the food resources of the land and sea. It provided continuity then, now and hopefully into the unknown future as well. It's a traditional practice associated with continuity and longevity.

MULTIPLE DEFINITIONS

Takurua comes from three words – **taku**, my or mine, and **rua** or hole in the ground. **Rua** comes from the word **va'arua** or hole in the ground. Physically, a **takurua**, refers to a gigantic ground oven prepared for a feast. It differs greatly from the ordinary household ground oven called **umu**, by its size, quantity and variety of food prepared.

Savage (1962) defines a **takurua** '... as a great tribal feast held on special occasions. Some **takurua** are held annually and most held occasionally. One special **takurua** was an annual feast held by the tribes when the people brought the first fruits of their respective lands as an offering to their ariki...'

I have personally seen **takurua** ground ovens measuring up to 9 metres long and 3 meters wide at the investitures of the following ariki high chiefs of Rarotonga: - Tinomana Tokerau of Puā'ikura, Pa Marie, of Takitumu, Makea Vakatini Joseph of Te'auotonga and Kainuku Kapiiri Te Rangi of Avana.

A second meaning of the word **takurua** is that of a special ground oven set aside for a wedding, anniversary, birthday and dedication of new community halls. The principal feature of a **takurua** is its mammoth physical size and quantity of food prepared. It is a grand display of food products to its highest level for the social purpose of showing off one's food wealth and status. That vast amount of food requires a lot of hands in preparing it, and a lot of mouths in eating it.

In recent times Takurua can also mean a special dish or a food delicacy such as a prime fish or pork, typically involving traditional foods.

IMPORTANCE OF THE TAKURUA

The **takurua** is a time for food resources prepared a year or two in advance, to be displayed on a grand scale. It is a time and moment for the feast providers and affiliated families to show their generosity in sharing their 'food wealth' with everyone.

Takurua is the grand feast. It is the public meal garnished with traditional speeches, pe'e and songs to highlight its importance for the people who shared and still share a large part of their lives communally. The **takurua** may have changed in terms of the meat sources of food like commercial chicken replacing home raised chicken. But its emphasis to display food wealth has not changed.





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CONNECTIONS TO EACH ISLAND

Each island has a takurua for all public occasions. They may have a different name but the goal of showcasing ones' ability to raise food wealth communally with kinsmen and tribe is still the same. Mauke has the rangokere feast on Christmas and new year where two villages take turns being the host. Mitiaro has a similar feast called makoi held yearly on New Year's Eve. Aitutaki has the matariki feast to celebrate the new lunar year. Mangaia of course has many feasts recorded by the missionary Rev William Gill.

Since there are two distinct languages in the country – Maori and Pukapuka – the latter would have their own word. But the goal of the takurua, is still the same.

CONNECTIONS TO FOOD

Meat, especially chicken, fish and pork and in more recent times goat meat, and beef with root crops of taro and kumara are the measures of a feast with mana or authority. More recently potatoes have entered the menu as also mayonnaise salads via French Polynesia. But the Maori indigenous food still has a higher status than imported food.

The whole community contributes in food and labour. They also share in the glory of the feast. They add mana to their takurua via their own personal contributions in terms of food contributions. A 1,000-kilogram pig for example has a different mana than a hundred sucklings. A boar with mammoth tusks has its own mana.

So how much food is actually displayed? In the visit of the Maori Queen of New Zealand in the 1980s, each household in a particular village was given the quota of a pig while the six rangatira chiefs produced 10each. The village had roughly eighty homes but produced over four hundred pigs. One household of 10 people produced 21 pigs.

This example for just one village gives you an indication on the quantity of food contributed to this momentous occasion. Most homes put in on average a quota of ten to 15cartons of commercial boxes of chicken. Homes with a higher number of adults with cash employment provide up to 20 cartons of chicken. Higher quantities of the right meat sources of pork and chicken are the key drivers to outbid home contributions.

Another major change in the takurua is the diversity in cooking styles and recipe in food preparations. New cuisines from Asia, French Polynesia, Fiji Indians and Kiwi Europeans have entered into our foodlore to spice the meals of a feast.

Feasts were usually not taken communally but food parcels were shared to each household in special coconut basket food plates called raurau and taken home to be consumed. Today feasts are prepared to be eaten rather than taken home.

MAORI TERMS THAT INCLUDE A FEAST:

TAKURUA – Great feast on a special occasion.

TAKURUA TAPU – a sacred festival at which was enacted the procession of the gods.

POKAI-TARATARA – Extraordinary festival for tribes.

PŌKAI TIROA – Tribal feast celebrating an event.

PŌKAI TĀPINI – Tribal feast to entertain visitors.

MIRI'AIA – festival during the season of plenty.

TARAKAI – Festival highlighting a day of rejoicing.

MA 'ANA-A-PURUA – A fasting festival.

PO RORO – Haircutting ceremony.

MAIRE – Festival of Celebrations.

UMUKAI – an oven of food. Often denotes a feast

IMPORTANT LAND PLANTS ASSOCIATED TO FOODS AND FEASTS:

KUMARA – sweet potato

KURU – breadfruit. Linked to land.

MEIKA – bananas. Substitute for human body.

NU / NIU –Green for Tangaroa. Red to Rongo.

U 'I – Yam.

MANIOTA / PIA – arrowroot.

TO – sugarcane. Food of the gods.

KAVA – a root crop no longer used.

ARA – pandanus.

AUTE – Paper mulberry – Anga/Tapa

'UE – Gourd

TI – Cordyline terminalis

TUITUI – Candlenut

MIRO / TAMANU / 'AU

PUAKA – pig.

MOA – Chicken.





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CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE

Traditionally, a takuria is reserved for important occasions of a tribe like the blessing of a new community hall or the investiture of a new chief. It is organised by people of influence and mana within the community at the traditional chiefly level, church and government. It is most importantly organised and implemented by the group for the group.

An individual may host a private feast of a wedding or birthday. That individual may use the word takuria in his or her speeches to enhance the occasion, but the function itself will not be considered a true takuria, because of its private nature. A takuria is foremost, a public social gathering of food resources to be shared publicly amongst the many and not privately, amongst the few guests.

CONNECTIONS TO FESTIVALS, CELEBRATIONS, SONG AND DANCE

The takuria was always the grand feast for a celebration of a new child, a wedding, an investiture and other group activities of great importance to the village like the building of a voyaging vessel. Certain festivals called Matariki celebrated the coming of the new year for example in the season of akaāu. (September to February)

Maori festivals followed the two Maori seasons of Paroro and Akaāu - of the wet and dry seasons. Below is a pe'e song telling the people of Aitutaki to prepare their pits of green bananas for the festival of the new year called Matariki where the first fruits of the land are displayed. Bunches of green bananas are put in a hole and covered with soil. Then a fire is lit above the hole to hasten the process of ripening the bananas below.

Tūtū e te 'ua raki
Apopo e tūtū ei te meika ki Matariki
Ei tauturu i te marokura i Avarua
E Rongo e, - turuturu o te kauariki ki runga
Ano mai ana au, ia rako pukupuku
Ia rako pakepakeā
Nga niu kake tu ia Ā-tonga
Tana tuitui, tana ā'i kā
Ei tuitui māramarama ia e taku oa
Oea, oea, oea ra
Ko au teia ko Tanemaitai
Aitu enua e, tuoro ia mai a Tanemaitai
Kia pipiri, kia o'ongi, kia mumuka

*Listen to this call of the first fruits
tomorrow, we prepare banana pits for Matariki
to support our traditional leaders in Avarua
O Rongo God of agriculture - support your leaders
I have come in the past, fully laden with my root
crops and animals,
my drinking nuts from the southern trees and northern trees of the island
Your candle nut lanterns, burning bright
can be our light my friend
and together we paddle in unison
This is i, Tanemaitai
calling, owners of the land, welcome Tanemaitai
that we unite, greet and celebrate as one*

The pe'e highlights the preparation of banana pits, root crops, and coconuts from both ends of the island to be harvested for drinking. It alludes to the candle nut lanterns shining the way, and the metaphor of rowing together as one united people on this venture. The caller ends his song by addressing the landowners for their generous contributions that the takuria may go down in social history to be remembered.

Another pe'e sings a similar request except this time it addresses Ngati Tairimapuapua of Makea Arera.

*Ka karongo mai e te tini
To kete nui ki to rima
To pakau nui ki to rima
Uria te papa i te Ika a Tangaroa
Nga nu kake roa i Arai te tonga
I te kau ariki rangi e
E titiro ki te moana*

*Kua pu'era te ngatāe
Kua tere papaku te mangō
Kupekupe rere te rau manu
E titiro kia Ka'o Pito, Mango Nui e
Ko te kuku matie, ko te tunani e
Para'ara'a te āra i Ka'o Pito
Ko'ia ki te kete, ei angai i te Ika tuārangi*





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CONNECTIONS TO COOKING

Preparation for the takurua takes time. It can vary between two years or more in duration. Planting the food crops and animals to be raised and set aside for the takurua is done by the whole community. The right ear of the selected pigs for the takurua are marked with a cut and fattened by men, women and children.

The second stage is the physical digging of the ground oven by the men a few days before the event. Machinery has done that in more modern times. Management of the umu and the positioning of stones and firewood belong to the men. There are wind specialists called matakī. He supervises the arrangement of the firewood and stones that go below and above the firewood in the ground oven. He ensures that there are enough wind tunnels inside the umu to add to an even burning of the firewood. He supervises the lighting of the umu.

There is also a man called tumu umu who is basically in charge of the time the umu is lit. He also regulates the heat of the umu and arranges the food parcels in the steaming oven in accordance to the wind directions and is in charge of re-opening the umu. Women have their separate smaller umu for the fruit puddings of bananas, pumpkins and pawpaws. Most ground ovens are lit before midnight to coincide with a meal at lunch time the following day. The fire is allowed to burn up to six hours before the umu is raked and the remaining logs of firewood removed and the hot stones raked flat. Some stones are taken out as outlay on top of the food parcels so there is heat from the bottom and top of the food parcels. Trays of chicken and meat goes first in the umu followed by root crops placed downwind because they cook easily. These are placed on top of the meat trays and not directly on the bottom.

Other food like vegetables, mayonnaise, *poke* and raw fish are prepared separately by the women. These are a recent introduction to the *takurua* feast. The grand *umu* is opened two hours before the appointed time for the feast and laid on the table before and during the arrival of guests. Timing is important. Part of the feast show, is to exhibit the hot food brought to the table – as in modern day restaurants and placed in front of guests.

Once the food is on the table, those who helped with the *umu* go home to clean up.. They return in their best clothes for the feast. Wearing your best *kakau* costume to a *takurua* is consistent with the overall presentation of food for the feast.

METHODS OF COOKING:

TA'U UMU – baking & steaming in ground oven. Best cover are *rau ti*, *meika* & *kota'a*.

TUNUTUNU – barbecue open fire.

TUNUPAKA – to roast on fire embers

TĀMARŌ – dry, in sun. Eg; fish.

PĀ-RA'A – Meat flattened, spread out & broiled over coral. Baking unwrapped food.

TUNU KI RUNGA I TE RE'U – cooking food in embers or hot ashes. (**PURE'U?**)

Re'u mura – live embers/ **Re'u a'i** – cinders, ashes from fire.

RAVARU – food wrapped in *rau ti*.

TUMU – broiling with special care on food prepared for a chief.

'ĀTUI is broiling on coral or black rocks and

Pu 'oro is steaming in a closed 'ue (*calabash/ gourd*).

CLOTHING

ANGA – ancient cloth made from Aute bark.

POKURU – cloth from breadfruit bark.

PONA – inner garment made from soft tapa worn under a *tiputa* or other outer garment.

PUREKAU – a native girdle.

PURATEA – fine soft quality ancient garment made from lemon hibiscus bark. Properly treated, it is white, very soft & strong.

REUREU – Ancient waist covering worn by women of various styles plain or decorated

TIA / REI – Ancient neck ornament.

TIKORU – White native cloth of fair thickness used for clothing. Especially worn by priests.

TIPUTA – White native cloth used for clothing.





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There are two seasons – *paroro* and *'akaāu*. They represent the dry and rainy seasons respectively of six and a half months each for our 13 month lunar calendar. They provide different food sources that are planted according to the seasons and *arapo* or phases of the moon.

In our calendar we have two weeks in a month, where a week lasts 15 nights. The 15 phases of the new moon week for example is a time for planting root crops for both seasons. The full moon week is the opposite, so fruit trees and products like vegetables that mature above ground are planted.

During the *akaāu* wet season, root crops like taro are planted during the new and full moon weeks. Fruit trees like coconuts and avocado are planted only during the full moon weeks. In the *paroro* dry season, root crops like yams, maniota and kumara are planted in the new moon weeks and vegetables in the full moon weeks. Thus, the abundance of vegetables from May to August and their absence thereafter.

In the wet season of *'akaāu* more root crops are planted. For example, yam is planted during the wet season to mature in the *paroro* dry season. Taro is planted in the hot and wet season to take advantage of the rain. This suits the old variety of taro that matures in a year. Today there are new varieties maturing between six and eight months. This has allowed many households, taro all year round.

Certain fish spawn and mature in certain seasons. Maroro flying fish for example spawn in June and July. The mountain banana or *vei'ua-tu* matures during the *'akaāu* season. Certain festivals accompany the maturity of these food resources and the *takurua* celebrate their harvests seasonally. Certain *ra'ui* or food conservations are also placed on food resources beforehand.

The roots of the *tī* plant and the fermented breadfruit are food preserved for the wet and hurricane season. The roots of the *tī* (cordyline) are an excellent source of toffee for the people during the hurricane season. It is an important source of famine food. Together with the fermented breadfruit they provided an immediate safety net after a major hurricane. They prevent outright starvation.

The breadfruit is prepared and buried to ferment in special dug out holes lined with stones and banana leaves along the sides. They are prepared during the cool months from July to August and after the first season of the breadfruit finishes in August. The preparation anticipates the hurricane season beginning in November.

