



# The RAPA NUI EXPERIENCE

Photo's by Pierre Bouras  
Words by Manu Bouvet

*Carine Camboulives and Manu Bouvet meet up with the Race For Water Odyssey on Easter Island. The around the world expedition that aims to draw up the first global assessment of plastic pollution in the ocean has a lot to teach us about our favourite environment.*

**T**here are 5 gyres of plastic in the oceans...

A gyre is a slow rotating whirlpool created by currents, coupled with wind and the earth's rotation, where plastic trash circulating in the ocean accumulates, forming extensive patches of plastic trash (covering a total area equivalent to 20 times the size of Great Britain).

Every year more than 25 million tons of plastic end up in the ocean. Today, no beach is safe from plastic pollution, even the most remote. Rapa Nui (native name for Easter Island) is the most isolated island on earth and is the perfect place to prove it. On the up side of Rapa Nui's isolation in the Pacific Ocean, its potential as a wave magnet is one to none...

Carine together with our daughters Lou and Shadé and I are about to meet the MOD 70 (70 foot long Trimaran) carrying the colours of the Race For Water non-profit organization in Rapa Nui, half way through its circumnavigation.

The expedition is making a stop on the most isolated island on earth for field collections of marine debris. The scientists on board, together with the rest of the crew will work on estimating the concentration (mass of plastic compared to the sampled beach area) and the sources of plastic debris (fishing and tourism industries, domestic waste).

What makes also a strong connection between us and the Race for Water Odyssey is that its crew members (including Stève Ravussin , multihull skipper and record holder of the Jules Verne Trophy) are all avid board riders, hooked on SUP...





## TONGA RIKI

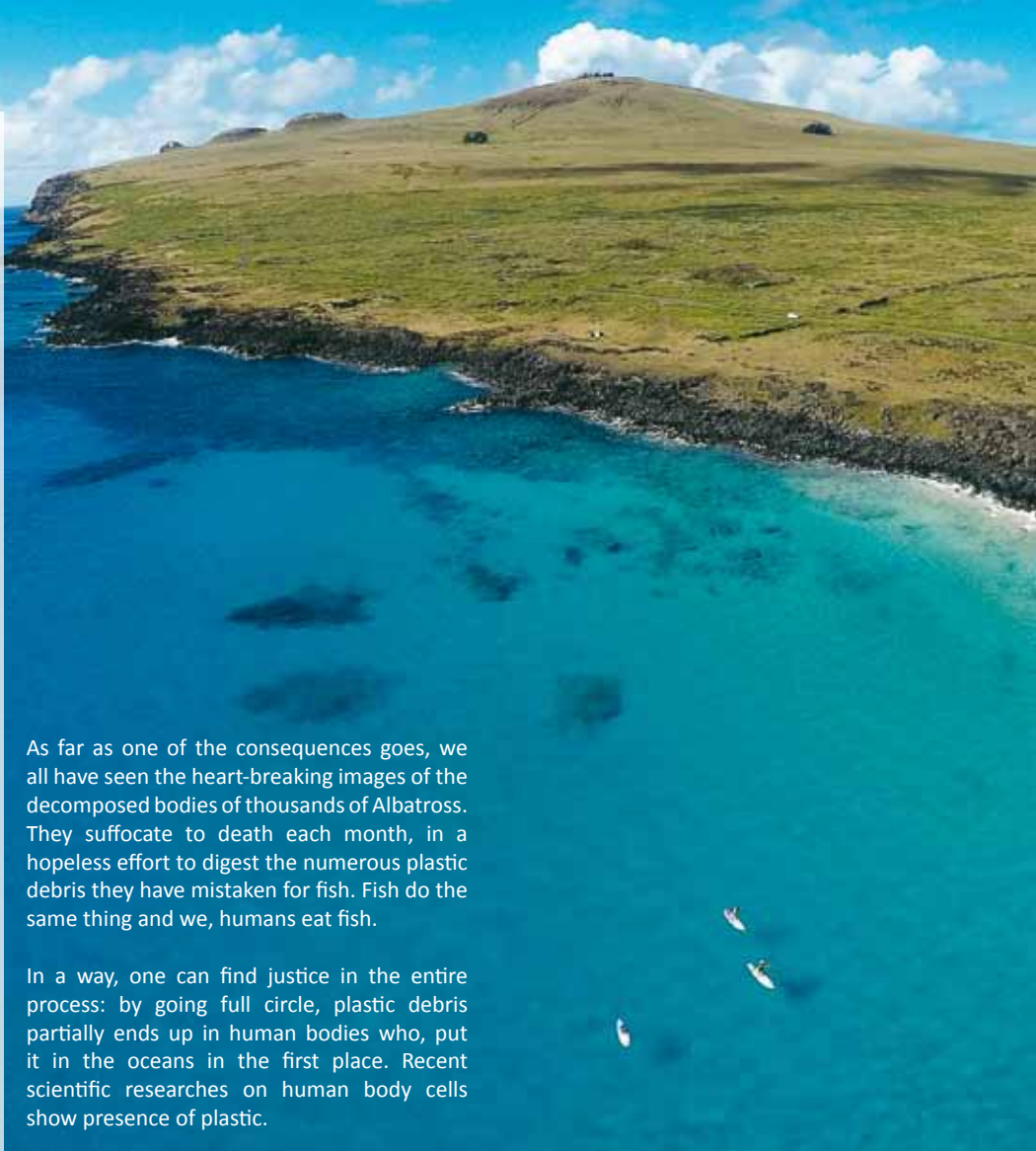
The Bay of Tonga Riki on the south-east coast of Rapa Nui has no equivalent on earth. On a bright autumn morning, we are waiting for the RFWO to appear on the horizon.

That Bay is also known for having one of the island's most spectacular line-up. The large and stunning horse-shoe shaped bay made of lava rocks on one side and thousand feet high cliffs on the other melts into a fluorescent green pasture where wild horses play. In the back, Rano Raraku volcano stands proudly in front of the intense look of 15, ten metre high Moai that are perfectly lined up, few metres from the shore line. These mysterious and huge sculptures, most likely representing the ancestors of the community complete a scene that would give chicken skin to any visitor before they can take their first selfie. That is a statement on how powerful the scenery is! Nonetheless what makes Tonga Riki, for us surfers, the spot with the most 'Mana' on earth (energy or force in Hawaiian) is that, on the right south swell, a long right hander with a steep drop over shallow rocks would handle any size while peeling across the bay. The short and intense left on the other side of the peak is only manageable when smaller.

After being invited on board the futuristic sailboat and experiencing the adrenaline rush that provides a 30 knots plus ride we get back to dry land after throwing anchor in Anakena Bay, one of the only two sandy beaches on the island. According to island oral traditions, Anakena was the landing place of Hotu Matu'a, a Polynesian chief who led a two-canoe settlement party here and founded the first settlement on Rapa Nui. The stunning pink sand contrast with the green covered hills on top of which several majestic Moai stand tall.

The scientists of the expedition plan an on-shore sampling of plastic debris in this breathtaking landscape followed by a workshop with local kids. Kids are great for such mission as their low centre of gravity and good quality eyes are a must to spot micro plastic. Lou and Shadé share a screen and a bucket of water to filter the sand and have a pair of tweezers each. Overlooked by Marco Simeoni, the president of Race for Water Foundation they are in charge of filtering a 60 cm square of sand by 10 cm deep. It is hard to imagine the amount of micro-plastic Lou and Shadé collect in such a small amount of sand, representing the highest density of plastic collected so far by the expedition!

When we put into perspective the fact that Easter Island is the most isolated island on earth with only a 5 000 people population that gives a good idea of how far plastic travels, how bad it took over the oceans and how long it is around for.



As far as one of the consequences goes, we all have seen the heart-breaking images of the decomposed bodies of thousands of Albatross. They suffocate to death each month, in a hopeless effort to digest the numerous plastic debris they have mistaken for fish. Fish do the same thing and we, humans eat fish.

In a way, one can find justice in the entire process: by going full circle, plastic debris partially ends up in human bodies who, put it in the oceans in the first place. Recent scientific researches on human body cells show presence of plastic.



Plastic...it gets everywhere.

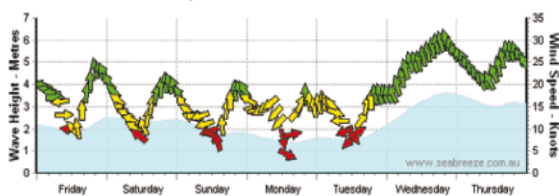






# Everything you need for SUP!

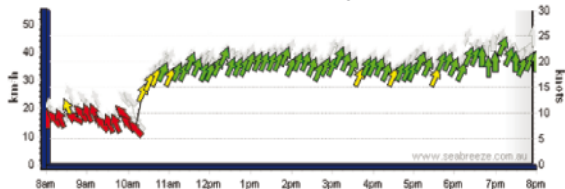
7 Day Wind & Wave Forecast



## ➤ 7 Day Wind + Wave Forecasts

Know with accuracy when it's the best time to hit the water

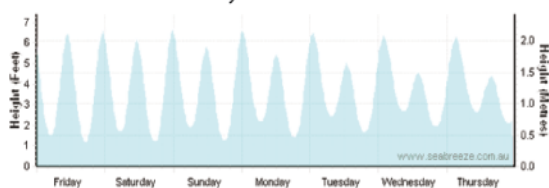
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## Riding Rapa Nui

After spending several hours in the back breaking activity we can't resist the call from the crystal clear waters of the bay. I adjust Shadé's Ergo baby on my back before the 3 of us jump on our SUP's for a long paddle along the North coast's lava cliffs.

As mentioned earlier, Rapa Nui only has two sandy beaches; the rest of the coast being more enjoyable from the sea which makes, once again, SUP boards a must have. On the other hand the ruff coastline makes most surf breaks hard to access.

Apart from the waves in Hanga Roa, the island's only town, that are the easiest and the most accessible and where Carine, Lou and I can share some rippable waves together, all other waves on Rapa Nui are challenging: really powerful, fuelled by raw Pacific ocean energy, they break in front of lava rocks or cliff that makes getting in and out of the water pretty hard and last but not least they are very often empty which makes it even more challenging when big.





On a good south swell day we show up early at Tonga Riki. Travel guides are right; seeing the sun rising on the bay is breathtaking. On its way up from behind the cliffs the sun slowly unfolds its light, first on the Moai's backs giving them a rare orange tone then on the entire pasture to finally explode on the volcano. If the left was not looking so tempting we would probably stay there staring in awe. Instead I jump in the back of the truck reaching for my board while Pierre, the photographer and Théo, the cameramen are getting ready to hike to a spot they had scouted a while ago.

They know the shot they want to get with the Moais in the foreground and I know the wave I want to get; the second or third of the set that breaks a litter further out from the rocks and gives me a chance to exit. The take off area is gnarly and gets that boiling water/ slab look that makes getting into the wave very tricky. It takes me a good 30 minutes to ride my first wave after negotiating a challenging air drop. I draw a quick line until I find an emergency exit before I end on dry rocks. Great adrenaline rush but I know already that there won't be many of those if I want to keep my board in one piece. I take my time to enjoy the moment and look around to better take it all in. I have never felt such "Mana" anywhere I have surfed before. From the peak I see well the fifteen Moais that I don't expect to turn around to look at my performance. Still, with every challenging session came a quick prayer for protection from these big guys.

The surfing doesn't come easy on Easter Island, so doesn't the yachting or life in general. That is what you get for experiencing some of the greatest earth's mysteries on such isolated land. There is a ruff feeling to the place, its landscapes, climate, customs and people. The weight of the island's history made of exodus and tribal wars can still be felt nowadays as Rapa Nui is still struggling to live in peace with its identity and attachment to Chile. On the other hand, for the ones that are willing to spend enough time there, to wait for the right moment to either get in the water or meet people, then Easter Island will share the best of its Mana for what will be a stepping stone in a traveller's life.

Nonetheless if it took thousands of years for Rapa Nui to create the geologic and historic heritage it represents today, it only took us, humans, a century or so to put at risk the entire ecosystem that surrounds it. After looking at the sand the way the Race for Water Odyssey taught me to, I know I will never look at it the way I did before. It bothers me to realize it.

It bothers me not only because Mother Nature suffers but, selfishly, because it will temper the joy I get from simply putting my feet in the sand and feeling it between my toes. It bothers me because, 40 years ago, when I was Shadé's age, going to the beach with a bucket and a screen, there was hardly any of that plastic that I found in my screen 40 years later. It bothers me because it is all happening in my life time. At the end what maybe bothers me the most is that I can't blame it on anybody.

Manu Bouvet.



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## ROAD BOOK

**Getting there :** - There is only 2 ways to get to Easter Island, both with Lan Chile, the Chilean airline, either from Santiago Chile or Papeete French Polynesia. LAN was the first airline to open an air connection with the island in 1968. Boat was the only way before that !  
LAN Chile has daily flights from Santiago Chile to Easter Island. Flights continue on to Papeete French Polynesia. Lan Chile is a windsurfers/ surfer friendly airline. Starting at 450US\$ to Mataverí Airport (Easter Island) - [www.lan.com](http://www.lan.com)

**When to Go :** - Easter Island has waves year round and catches swell from both the North and South but is more consistent in the south hemisphere winter (May to September).

**Where to stay :** - Plenty of options from camping to high hand resorts. We stayed at Rapa Nui cabins that had several clean and convenient bungalows right by the ocean and close to town for 2 to 4 people with kitchen starting at US\$60 per night.  
[rapanuicabins@gmail.com](mailto:rapanuicabins@gmail.com)

Your SUP connection on the Island Christophe Conry:  
[www.rapanuistandup.com](http://www.rapanuistandup.com)

You will need a car on Easter Island, especially if you want to surf or windsurf. Car rental starting at \$45/day. 4x4 are not mandatory.  
More info at - [www.chile.travel](http://www.chile.travel) & [www.turismochile.travel](http://www.turismochile.travel)