Fiji Islands Handbook (Review)

Kay K. Sanger

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BOOK REVIEWS


Review by Steven Roger Fischer

"'Iorana! Pehe koe? Rivariva!' ("Hello! How are you? Fine!")

What a thrill to be able to speak Rapanui. And now you yourself can learn it at last—right in your very own hare 'home, house' with the friendly assistance of the delightful booklet Speak Rapanui! It's the brand-new Rapanui language primer by Betty Haoa and Bill Liller of the Biblioteca William Mulloy in Vitia del Mar, Chile, and profits from its sale will go to the Easter Island Foundation to promote the study of the Rapanui culture and the preservation of Easter Island’s physical patrimony.

Let me tell you straight off: the "Little Red Book" is sheer fun. Its design, by Tamara Liller and Alan Drake is brilliant. Even the manu piri double-bird figure that adorns the front cover proclaims what the marvelous little primer is all about: everything in it is double, with English on each left-hand page and Spanish on each right-hand page...

And pure Rapanui 'i te kōna ananake 'everywhere'. Speak Rapanui! is simple, informative, and entertainingly illustrated. The text is plainly written, the language examples are legion and easy to understand, there is a minimum of old-fashioned grammar and a maximum of enjoyment. The learner progresses from general observations about the Rapanui language to common words and phrases and helpful word lists. At the end, a handy bibliography points out the most useful and informative books and articles on the Rapanui language and mentions international periodicals dedicated to Polynesian language studies.

Speak Rapanui! is intended for the beginner, the tourist, the Rapanuiophile who wants that first thrilling plunge into the exhilarating pool of the vananga Rapanui ("Rapanui language"). It's the modern, living language that Speak Rapanui! offers. For example:

To your health! Manua!
Thank you Maurrenu
I love you He mate au kia kōe
It's okay Ti tika ā

Nearer all significant accents are shown using an accent mark, so that you'll have no problem placing the correct sentence or word stress. In order to achieve this, a linguistically more "proper" orthography has been dispensed with (for example, Ti tika ā for Titika 'ā). The presentation of grammar and the orthography—the booklet ignores most glottal stops and all vowel lengths, such as 'ā—follow the 1930s and 1950s models of Sebastian Englert and Jordi Fuentes. Sure, a bit antiquated according to modern linguistics. But it simplifies the difficult task tremendously.

You can learn Rapanui with it, and quickly too.

You learn about "Structures": the hare 'house', the manavai 'circular structure used to shelter plants', the tupā [tīpā] 'hollow stone structure 2-3 meters tall'. You get to know "Places": the ana [āna] 'cave', the hanga 'harbor, bay', the maunga [ma'unga] 'hill, mountain', the rano 'lake, crater'. "For Nature Lovers" tells us of the makohe 'frigate bird', the moa 'chicken', the paithena 'dog', the miro 'tree, wood', the moko 'lizard'. Similar word lists, from pages 56 to 119 offer useful and historical artifacts, common nouns, persons, titles, time, weather, food and drink, transportation, and a host of other categories that will quickly submerse you in the Rapanui world...and in the Rapanui tongue. ——

Ku hanga ā au mo obo ki 'a Rapa Nui ("I want to go to Rapanui")

Now all of us can. Like never before.

With Speak Rapanui! / Hable Rapanui!


Review by Kay Kenady Sanger

Writing a guidebook about Fiji, a country with 322 inhabited islands scattered across 1,290,000 square kilometers of the South Pacific is not exactly a breeze. The place is home to seven ethnic groups with separate cultural traditions, dozens of accommodations from swank to dank, and a long list of appealing attractions that can change with the whim of a strong hurricane. The trick is to equip the traveler with plenty of necessary information while taking care to create a volume that is not too big to stuff in a backpack.

David Stanley's Fiji Islands Handbook will probably accompany many a Fiji-bound traveler, since it manages to deliver hundreds of useful details in a compact 5x7 format. Stanley gains a reader's confidence right up front by requesting current information in an interactive section entitled "Is this book out of date?" As Stanley explains, travel writing is a little like trying to take a picture out of the side of a bus—things change fast.

That said, Stanley presents a list of each and every hotel in the country with prices and useful notes about each one that make it sound like he or a responsive reader actually stayed at all of these places. Neither of the other two Fiji guidebooks consulted by this reviewer were so complete or so honest. For example, Stanley lets readers know which hotel has a pounding disco next door and which of the hostel restaurants is owned by the best fisherman around. Restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and even public toilets and dental clinics are detailed for each island. Thirty-eight maps help readers find these spots.

Up-front sections on history and government, people, and customs should be required reading before a visit to Fiji. For example, Stanley explains Fiji's strict dress code, warning readers that wearing short shorts or a bathing suit anywhere...
but at the tourist resorts is considered offensive. Also in the 
up-front sections, those who have been to Easter Island my be 
interested in reading about where they can go to enjoy a meal 
of fish and sweet potatoes prepared in the Fiji version of an 
“umu” underground oven, called a “lovo.” Indeed, no stone 
had been left unturned by the author as he describes traditional 
customs.

This front-of-the-book section also has a pronunciation 
guide that will save travelers from the embarrassment of pro-
nouncing the “a” in Nandi (should be Nadi) and the “th” in 
Thithia (should be Cicia). Stanley’s list of toiletries and a 
medical kit to take to Fiji would be useful for travelers to 
other South Pacific Islands as well.

The second half of the book takes readers on an island-by-
island journey across Fiji, detailing the sights, services, enter-
tainment, accommodations and restaurants available. This 
book is so different from the usual brochure drivel about vis-
its to a “South Seas paradise” that the reader feels an instant 
trust in the information. For example, how many guidebooks 
would warn us that at the Century Cinema in Suva “rats run 
freely beneath the seats as soon as the lights go out”?

Stanley encourages visitors to stay in villages if possible, 
rather than just relaxing on the beach at expensive resorts. 
After all, R&R can take place in a spot where the culture isn’t 
so accessible and interesting. In Fiji, visitors have a chance to 
encounter Polynesians, Micronesians, East Indians, Chinese, 
and Europeans; and each have their own rituals and customs 
to be respected.

As one who has been embarrassed by ignorant American 
tourists in the past, this reviewer was pleased to see that Stan-
ley takes every opportunity in the book to explain, admonish, 
and suggest acceptable way to behave with each of these 
groups. For example, Stanley reminds those who visit tradi-
tional Fijians to ask permission before entering a village and 
to take off their hats while there because only the chief is 
allowed to wear one. He also suggest that visitors carry bun-
dles of kava roots to present to their hosts and to prepare a 
meal and is said to be available also on the island. Total time: 
74:20 minutes. Price is US$20 or 25 D Marks. A second CD 
will appear later this year.

CORRECTIONS

Correction: The book review of Easter Island: 
The Endless Enigma, reviewed by Dan Gartner (RNJ 10:2, 
pg 49) incorrectly identified the author of the book as 
José Luis Velasco; The author’s name is José Luis 
Rosasco. We regret the confusion.