



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
HON MARK BROWN
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

MEDIA RELEASE
TWO-WAY QUARANTINE-FREE TRAVEL BEGINS
17 MAY 2021

On behalf of the nation, Prime Minister Mark Brown was pleased to welcome the first planeload of tourists and other visitors to the Cook Islands today, as full two-way quarantine-free travel with New Zealand officially begins.

The arrival of today's flight at Rarotonga International Airport comes more than a year after government made the decision to close our borders in an effort to protect the country and the health of our people from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was a difficult decision but a necessary one," said Prime Minister Brown.

"However, we were ultimately successful in our goal and we still remain one of less than a dozen countries worldwide who remain COVID-free.

"So now, with our borders reopening and the process of vaccinating our people against COVID-19 beginning, we look to the future.

"As I have said before, the hard work is not over.

"It will take time for our tourism industry to fully restart itself again after 14 months in hibernation, and we will all have to readjust to what is yet another new normal in this time of COVID-19.

"Even now, as we set out on our road to economic recovery, we must also continue to be mindful of the fact that COVID-19 is still out there, beyond our borders.

"In addition to vaccination, I ask you all to remember our health and safety protocols, maintain good hygiene habits, tag in everywhere you go with your CookSafe card and make sure you download the new CookSafe+ app. All simple actions that will help keep everyone safe and well as we welcome new visitors to our shores once again.

"The past year has proven that we are all resolute, adaptable and resilient. We have all done the hard yards and I would like to thank all those who have kept the faith and who have worked so tirelessly to get us to where we are today."

The Prime Minister also made special tribute to his New Zealand counterpart the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern and the 'team of five million', acknowledging the joint efforts of agencies from both countries that have been working behind the scenes to make the border reopening and vaccination program possible.

With a gradual easing of the border opening in mind, Air New Zealand will be increasing their schedule by one flight a week, starting with three weekly flights from May 24 and building up to a total of six flights each week from June 14. This schedule will be revisited in July according to demand.

Ends: Any enquiries to Press Secretary, Jaewynn McKay +682 55486