



Meitaki Ma'ata



After months of lockdown and quarantine, the Cook Islands Government repatriation of stranded Cook Islanders can be deemed a resounding success.

Three groups of Cook Islanders, residents, and permit holders have now been repatriated since the government began the repatriation process in April 2020.

While it has been difficult on those who completed supervised quarantine both here and in NZ, the entire process is being widely applauded given the Cook Islands was one of the first in the Pacific to repatriate 260 residents' home safely.

Following Cabinet's decision to repatriate Cook Islands residents caught up in the border closures in March, there has been much effort to coordinate their safe return. This was especially sensitive with arrangements beginning while NZ was still in lockdown – alert level 4.

"We have many people to thank" says Dr Herman Secretary of Health, "and we hope we have not overlooked them in the list below".

"What this project highlighted, was the strength of our professional relationships and collegial links to our diaspora who have been instrumental in helping us organise this repatriation process.

"We acknowledge Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director General NZ Ministry of Health, Dr Dale Bramley, CEO Waitemata District Health Board, and Dr Joe Williams, Clinical Director Mt Wellington Integrated Health Care. Their three organisations signed an Arrangement of Cooperation with Te Marae Ora in July 2019.

"May we also commend Dr Kiki Maoate and Mrs Debbie Sorenson the respective President and CEO of Pasifika Medical Association (PMA) for their leadership and organising the PMA team to oversee the repatriation process in Auckland. Dr Joe Williams is Patron of PMA and played an important role in providing clinical support for the daily health checks with the support of Whanau Ora team leaders John Kiria.

Dr Ted Hughes a longstanding member of PMA and one of several senior clinical advisors to Te Marae Ora also assisted in facilitating this process. While Mrs Rosie Blake Cook Islands Auckland Consular General and her team comprising Tarita and Francis provided social welfare checks.

Four weeks of supervised quarantine has been a challenge for many, yet one Cook Islands family found the final two weeks in Rarotonga rather enjoyable.

Marisa Newman, Air NZ's Cook Islands Manager, travelled to New Zealand with her family of five to check up on her elderly parents. After borders were shut, they ended up being away from their Rarotonga home for seven weeks.

The family began the final phase of the repatriation process last month, with two weeks of supervised quarantine at the Edgewater Resort and Spa.

"The service from the (Edgewater) team has been amazing," said Ms. Newman. "Congratulations to you and your fantastic team."

In addition to Maeva Henry and the staff at the Edgewater Resort and Spa, including the security team, it is a long list of those who have helped make this process such a success. To the following individuals, businesses, and organisations, the entire Cook Islands sends you a big Meitaki Maata.

- Cook Islands Government
- Pasifika Medical Association
- (Lucyanne Laurenson- Facilities manager, Craig Sionetuato – Logistics manager, and the PMA group, health team)
- Mt Wellington Integrated Health Centre and Whanau Ora
- New Zealand Ministry of Health
- New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Northern Region Health Coordinating Centre
- Cook Islands High Commission (Wellington)
- Cook Islands Consular General
- Air New Zealand
- Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health
- Cook Islands Police
- Cook Islands Airport Authority
- Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
- Cook Islands Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
- Edgewater Resort and Spa
- The Rarotonga Punas
- Cook Islands Tourism
- Cook Islands TV
- Cook Islands News
- Families and friends of those who were repatriated

From all of the Cook Islands, Meitaki Maata and Welcome Home.

The collective efforts of the above and others can be summed up by the following comments from some of our returnees:

"I was tearful when a luxury bus turned up to pick us up – it showed us how much our government and people cared about us." –KM

"Maeva and her team at the Edgewater looked after us so well...meitaki maata..." –JH

"...we were treated like kings and queens. It was an emotional welcome home with our people smiling and waving to us at the airport and on the roadside as we were transported to the Edgewater. It was beautiful to see Gods love through our people." –PK

"Debbie and her team were awesome, from the welcome reception at the hotel until they bid us farewell at Auckland Airport. Thank you so much" –MM

"I enjoyed my 'me time' in quarantine, the beautiful meals and allocated exercise time. I am proud of what the Prime Minister and his government have done for our people." –TF