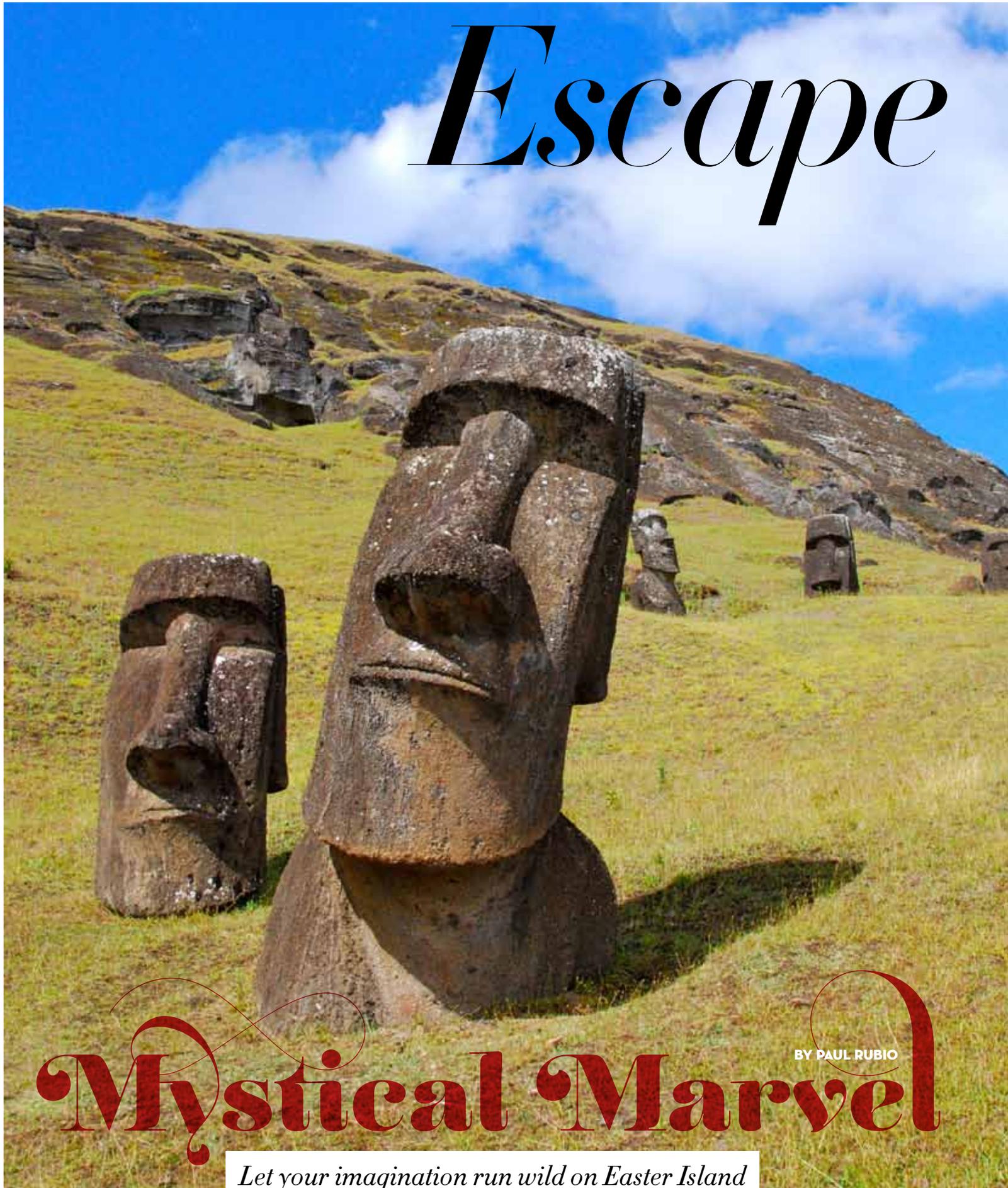


Escape



Mystical Marvel

BY PAUL RUBIO

Let your imagination run wild on Easter Island

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: ROOM AND EXTERIOR OF EXPLORA RAPA NUI; ONE OF THE ISLAND'S MANY MOAIS; THE BAR AT EXPLORA RAPA NUI; BIRDMAN PETROGLYPH AT RANO KAU.



EXPLORA

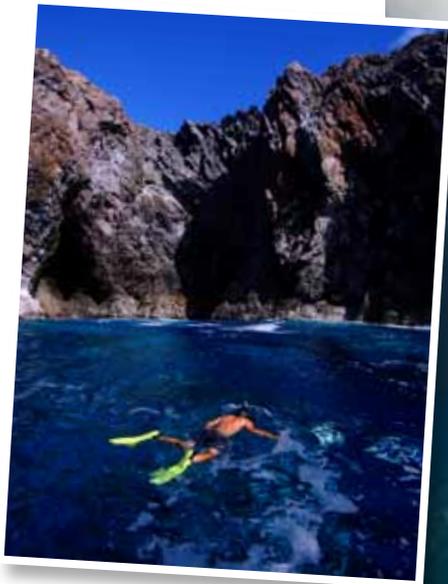
in the far corners of the island. Archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians all yearn to unravel the conundrums surrounding Rapa Nui's colonization (circa 300 AD to 1200 AD) and life thereafter.



Shrouded in mystery and strewn with iconic, larger-than-life statues, Rapa Nui—better known as Easter Island—is one of the world's most remote inhabited islands and has headlined bucket lists since the advent of leisure travel. Even as today's travel elite searches for the next great destination, this 63.2-square-mile speck in the middle of the Pacific Ocean still prevails as an undisputed must-see.

Easter Island's mystique has captivated explorers and travelers for nearly three centuries. On Easter Sunday in 1722, European voyagers stumbled upon an otherworldly Pacific island—thousands of miles from any other landmass—speckled with towering, multi-ton chess-like statues called *moai*. Scholars still debate the genesis of the *moai*, the role they played in society, and just how they arrived

Because no written history details the *moais'* significance, only oral lore sheds light on the multi-century evolution of these colossal sculptures. In the most general sense, *moai* honored important individuals in both life and death, offered protection against rival clans, and left legacies for future generations. Oral tradition notwithstanding, much ambiguity stems from a depletion of primary knowledge, first from civil wars and then from the slave trade of the nineteenth century, which decimated Easter Island's native population to just 111 individuals. However, this uncertainty catalyzes a palpable wow factor and stimulates the imagination. You know you've given into the magic of Easter Island when reality and make-believe blur and you subconsciously begin looking for secret passageways and channeling the *moai* in an effort to understand the island's enigmas.



EXPLORATIONS WITH EXPLORA, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: SNORKELING IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN; RANO KAU CRATER; AHU TONGARIKI; AERIAL VIEW OF EXPLORA AND EASTER ISLAND.



EXPLORA RAPA NUI

Easter Island's hypnotic lure and living history form a playground for luxury travelers thanks to the introduction of **Explora Rapa Nui**. The island's premier lodge, it offers three- to six-night expeditions inclusive of accommodations, adventures, and gourmet meals.

The lodge exemplifies green construction, built principally from volcanic rock and local wood. A low-rise masterpiece partitioned into design-driven suites, Explora Rapa Nui nestles a coastal hilltop, where wild horses roam and the unforgiving Pacific waves batter the craggy coastline. Throughout the property, you'll see a love match between modernism and minimalism with oversized panoramic windows, stylish day beds, and a

sleek swimming pool and spa area.

Explora offers more than 20 outings across this foreign land, with two half-day tours (or one full-day tour) per day. Groups are never larger than eight and are led by expert, bilingual guides. In between excursions, you'll return to your chic, luxurious base and feast in the lodge restaurant. Begin your days with sensational breakfast spreads including house-made breads, croissants, exotic jams, and superb omelets. At lunch and dinner, indulge in ocean-to-table delicacies, homemade gnocchi, rack of lamb, fine Chilean wines, and pisco sours. After another day navigating this wondrous island, the bar and lounge area are idyllic for unwinding and swapping stories with your fellow jet-set adventurers.

ISLAND EXPLORATIONS

The majority of Explora's prolific excursions focus on getting up close and personal with the island's many stone statues. The most experiential is arguably the climb up Rano Raraku, the *moai* stone quarry and birthplace of these 10- to 270-ton works of genius, where hundreds of statues have been partially reclaimed by the earth. This is where the statues were carved before being transported to the far reaches of the island. Nowadays, hundreds of statues peer out from the ground, partially buried—and some partially carved—forever freezing the moment in time when the *moai* quarry was abandoned.

Prepare to saturate memory cards and max out data storage on the tour to Ahu Tongariki, the superlative assembly of restored *moai* stand-

Escape



ENJOY A PICNIC OR A HIKE ON THE COASTLINE AND EXPERIENCE THE CULTURE OF RAPA NUI THROUGH DRESS AND DANCE.

ing 15 strong along the island's southeast shoreline. And you won't want to miss spelunking through Las Dos Ventanas cave and later ascending Rano Kau crater, the site of Easter Island's famous Birdman competition and a nineteenth-century worship grounds.

Beyond the *moai* rapture, look forward to other explorations by foot, bike, and boat. Hikes range from easy to rigorous with paths traversing the rocky coastline, passing along the perimeters of the island's extinct volcanoes, and delving into

mysterious caves that played instrumental roles in protecting islanders during times of civil war. Bike paths dot the island, granting endless hours of serenity in what feels like Earth's final frontier.

Although this is a tropical island, don't expect the typical beachside, fun-in-the-sun vacation. Easter Island has only two very small white-sand beaches. That being said, tiny local boats float at the ready for circumventing the island and snorkeling near the outer *motus*. In addition, the Hi Ika Artisinal Fisheries trip allows guests to learn about and practice local fishing techniques.

Regardless of which excursions you choose—and if you opt for the six-night expedition, you'll do most—this enigmatic island never fails to captivate and impress. (explora.com) ◀◀