

Easter Island





Moais were giant statues created to represent the first ancestors of each Easter Island tribes. They are made of basalt or tuff, and were built over almost 1,000 years, during which their shape was gradually refined and their size increased. They are c. 3 m tall but a few of them reached more than 10 m. There are 900 moais throughout the island.

Rano Raraku volcano is the quarry of all the moais.

They were built there and then transported to the coastline.





397 moais remain by the mountainside and 92 remain on their way to the coast.





This is the largest moai in the island, called “The Giant”, with 21,60 m.

Some moais are found still under carving.



The moai was transported to the ahu (platform by the coastline), where the pukao ("hat") and the white coral eyes were installed on it.



All pukaos were made of red scoria, here at Puna Pau site. Then, pukaos of more than 10 tons were moved to the ahus, some of them are 12 km away.



The meaning of the pukaos continues under discussion: Feather headdresses? Top Knots dyed with red earth? Bark cloth turbans?



This is the impressive Ahu Tongariki. →

The statue is placed by the coastline and faces the interior of the island, to give protection to the tribe that built it.

← The only exception is Ahu Akivi, which is in the interior and the 7 moais there are facing the ocean. They are thought to represent the first Polynesian discoverers of the island.



Actually most of the moais were found lying on the soil. The most extended theory suggests episodes of violence between tribes when the island became over-populated and the resources over-exploited, causing the demise of the civilization.



Between 1680-1850 a new culture emerged in the island: the Tangata Manu ("bird-man"). It was based on an annual event, a competition to collect the first Sooty Tern (manu tara) egg of the season from the islet of Motu Nui, swim back to Rapa Nui and climb the sea cliff of Rano Kau to the clifftop village of Orongo.



Finally, two curiosities

1) The Isla de Pascua Airport (Mataveri International Airport) is the most remote airport in the world. Its long runway (3,318 m) was once designated as an abort site for the U.S. Space Shuttle. It starts just inland from the island's southeast coast and nearly reaches the northwest coast. Of course, the airport has a moai:



2) There are 12 moais outside Easter Island (Paris, Washington, London, Liverpool, Chile, Brussels, New Zealand). The full list can be checked here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relocation_of_moai_objects

Moai at the British Museum, London



