





# Kiwanis in paradise

**CLUBS FROM ACROSS THIS ISLAND NATION HAVE MADE SERVICE FUN — AND A FAMILY AFFAIR.** By Fabienne April

Imagine an island where COVID-19 virus infections are largely nonexistent. Palm trees sway in the soft, warm winds as joyful Kiwanians from clubs around the island enjoy a picnic on the beach, sharing dishes from the island's many cultures.

Can you guess where we might be? Need more hints?

It would take approximately seven

hours to drive from the island's northern tip to its southern end, and about 1.5 hours to drive from the west side to the east side of the "Island of Eternal Spring."

This territory of France in the southwest Pacific Ocean encompasses a large island, which the locals call *le caillou* (the pebble), as well as smaller islands.









*Members of the Tiare Païta Kiwanis Club who represent the Pacific region and migrations to New Caledonia: (Left to right) Marie was born in New Caledonia in a family originating from the Wallis and Futuna Islands; Jacqueline is a Kanak; Titikua is from French Polynesia.*

no matter where they go. They also have a dark-red division outfit. For the last Asia-Pacific conference, they even wore a traditional Kanak outfit, also Kiwanis-branded.

“We’re small, but people see us all the time,” says Julien LeRay, past president of the Tiare Païta Kiwanis Club.

Annually, the division’s clubs invest about XPF15 million in multiple service projects.

You name it, they’ve done it: foot races, boat races, fairs, special events at Christmas or Easter, events at retirement homes, food collections, donations of furniture, clothing and linens for people affected by

Now you’ve got it: We’re in New Caledonia. The island has a striking diversity of people: the original inhabitants, the Kanak; people of European descent; Polynesians; Southeast Asians; as well as some people originally from North Africa.

Kiwanians there reflect that diversity, from their ethnicities to the range of their ages, professional backgrounds and more. Another striking thing is what so many have in common: New Caledonia has one of the world’s highest percentages of Kiwanians among its general population.

“At Kiwanis, we meet people from all walks of life who come together around the same cause, with the same values,” says Sandrine Baille, a member of the Kiwanis Club of Tiare Païta. “We build lasting friendships. We have the impression of being part of a great family. It’s motivating, rewarding, socially fulfilling.”

Each club has chosen a distinct color so that its members are recognized, and those members proudly wear Kiwanis-branded shirts in that color,











Regatta) is a festive event for which Kiwanians from different clubs build a raft representing Kiwanis out of metal container drums, to which they fix a sail. A race is launched off the large beach in Nouméa, the capital. It's a fun event because the precarious rafts often fail, to the delight of thousands of spectators. During the last regatta, Kiwanis was in the lead, but then its sail broke and other rafts caught up. The event narrator shouted on microphone "Go, Kiwanis, go!" for a very long time, putting the Kiwanians at the center of attention despite their unlucky circumstances.

The Ralia Kiwanis Club is well-known for its themed evening events where people dance and partake in local delicacies prepared by Kiwanians. The club also holds a yearly country ball, for which participants don cowboy boots and hats and line dance; an 80s-themed evening, where all guests dress in 1980s-style clothing and dance to retro tunes; and a Full Moon Party, complete with outdoor lighting and hot main dishes, desserts and drinks sold by club members during a concert.







Popular dishes served during these parties include nems (Vietnamese-style rice paper fried rolls), bami (Indonesian-inspired fried noodles with vegetables and meat), bougna (a Kanak specialty containing vegetables, such as yams and taro, and meats or seafood, wrapped in banana leaves and buried to cook in a ground oven) and many classic French dishes, such as quiches. One ingredient New Caledonians couldn't go without? Soy sauce!

Members organize several outdoor sports events that help New Caledonians discover the island and its nature. Indeed, New Caledonia has the richest bird and plant diversity in the world per square kilometer. The Érythrines Trek is organized by the Érythrines Kiwanis club as a fundraiser at the Déva

nature preserve. The trail faces the lagoon and the second-largest coral reef in the world.

"There are many things that I find touching at the Érythrines club," says Éric Buama, a member of the Kiwanis Club of Érythrines. "First of all, interacting with longtime Kiwanians. Presenting awards. Every project with children is always heartwarming when you see how amazed they are. I really like the sports and nature trek we organize. It's a lot of work for a good cause."

For the past 20 years, the Trail de l'Espoir (Trail of Hope) is a successful fundraiser organized by the Kenu Kiwanis Club and the Goro tribe in southern New Caledonia and run on the red dirt that is so typical of soils rich in nickel and iron.

During the yearly Teddy Bear Fair, each club






proposes free activities for children: inflatable bounce houses, face painting, small carousels, a knock-down-cans game and more. Kiwanians host a restaurant booth where thousands of attendees can purchase kebabs, cake, popcorn, sandwiches, French fries and grilled sausages. The mayor of Dumbéa generously allows Kiwanians to hold the event in the town-hall park free of rental charge.

Because airport traffic has nearly ground to a halt, Kiwanians started putting together solidarity baskets to distribute to airport employees who find themselves out of work. Baskets typically contain items collected from the general population, such as fruit, vegetables, cans of food, flour, sugar, rice, pasta, toothpaste or soap.

At the 2020 Nouméa carnival, a popular multicultural event, Kiwanians built an ocean-blue float named Kiwanis Ocean, bearing a sail. Members danced to the rhythm of music while parading down the streets lined with more than 25,000 on-lookers who gathered to see 17 total floats.

And even when Kiwanians take on the mundane task of gathering entrance fees to a city fair, they spice up the task by entertaining fair attendees with singing and synchronized dancing to the song “Jerusalem.”

Conviviality and friendship are key in New Caledonia. Kiwanians there aren’t just club members. They’re a community of friends who participate together in the island’s kaleidoscope of projects and fundraisers. And in doing so, they become a united family in paradise. 

Wondering about New Caledonia cuisine?  
Try the shrimp curry recipe on page 50.



## *Kiwanis in New Caledonia*

- 12 Kiwanis clubs, approximately 200 members
- 2 Key Clubs
- 1 Builders Club
- 1 CKI club
- 1 Aktion Club