

EASTER ISLAND

The towering statues, the moai, have stood for the last millennium – a testament to the people who made them

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean is a remote patch of earth with 887 giant stone carvings – most of them stretching up four metres, but some much taller. They were sculpted by

the Rapa Nui people, who first inhabited the island over 1,000 years ago. That they managed to quarry tons of volcanic rock and move the immense moai around Easter Island is a remarkable achievement.

GIANTS OF STONE

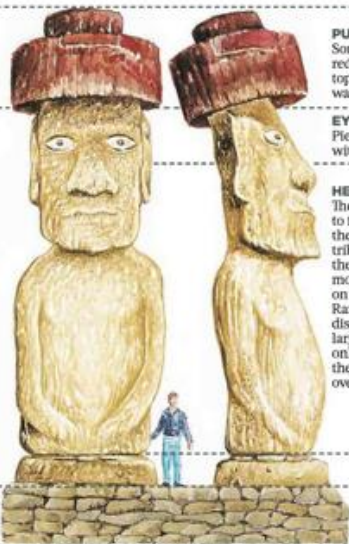
Legend says that the gargantuan monolithic sculptures – the moai – could walk when commanded by a king. Now, they silently keep watch over Easter Island

MOAI

The reasons why they were carved are not known for sure, but it is thought that they were carved to honour and pay homage to a tribe's chiefs or defied ancestors. Most of them are cut from compressed volcanic ash, found at a great quarry called Rano Raraku on the island.

HEIGHT
The heights vary from four to 10 metres. The height is related to the power of the clan that built it. The more powerful the clan, the taller the moai.

AHU
A stone platform



PUKAO

Some of the moai have red hat-like stones on top of the heads – red was a sacred colour.

EYES

Pieces of white coral with obsidian for pupils.

HEAD

They were positioned to face inland, facing the village of the tribe that carved them. With many moai – particularly on the slopes of Rano Raraku – their disproportionately large heads are the only thing visible, as the bodies were buried over the centuries.

ISLAND STORY

AD 300 - 800

Easter Island is settled. Legend says it was a Polynesian chief named Hotu Matu'a who arrived first with his wife and family, aboard two canoes.

1200

The Rapa Nui people are split by many tribes across the island, all of which carve moai out of volcanic rock.

1600

Throughout the 17th century, the natural resources – especially trees – run out, and the Rapa Nui civilisation declines.

1722

On Easter Sunday, the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeveen discovers the island and names it to mark the day.

1860s

Disease and slave raiders from Peru severely depletes the population – by the 1870s, only 111 people remain.

1888

A treaty is signed by naval officer Policarpo Toro with the Rapa Nui, annexing the island for Chile.

1935

Rapa Nui National Park is established and a mass conservation effort begins.

TODAY

A third of the inhabitants work for the Chilean government, to cope with the number of tourists.

THE ISLAND

With 887 moai dotted around Easter Island, the achievements of the Rapa Nui are staggering



According to legend, Hotu Matu'a first landed and settled on Easter Island at Anakena. It is one of the few sandy beaches on the island's rocky coastline.

The finest example on Easter Island of the pukao, as four large moai sport their heavy red hats.

AHU TAHAI



At some sites, several moai can be seen on the same ahu – like at Ahu Tahai on the western coast.

ANA TE PAHUA CAVES

HANGA ROA
Capital city of Easter Island

PUNA PAU QUARRY

AHU VAHIU

AHU AKAHANGA

EASTER ISLAND ROADS



The tomb of Hotu Matu'a, the first king and settler of Easter Island.

AHU AKIVI

At Puna Pau, the red volcanic rock, scoria, was harvested for pukao.

AHU VINAPU

Nearly all of the moai were made from rocks quarried at Rano Raraku.

Ancient tracks are thought to be a rudimentary road system, used to transport the heavy moai.

The largest ahu on the island, holding 15 moai – including, at over 80 tons, the heaviest moai erected.



1. HOW THEY WERE CARVED

Most of the giant moai were carved from rock harvested at Rano Raraku:

- Using stone picks, master sculptors would carve out the moai from one piece of compressed volcanic ash.
- The front and sides of the carving were finished before the rock underneath was chipped away, allowing it to be moved.
- The moai was then gradually slid down the slopes of Rano Raraku – the immense weight meant this required dozens of people.
- Finally, a ditch is cut at the bottom of the slope and the moai stood up inside it so the sculptor can complete the back and shoulders.

2. HOW THEY WERE MOVED

Transporting the exceptionally heavy moai to their final location was a daunting task:

- It could take 100 people to drag a single moai, even on a wooden sledge.
- Using tree trunks and logs as rollers led to Easter Island being deforested.

3. ONTO AN AHU

Once moved, the moai were set on large stone platforms:

- The moai was raised by piling small stones behind it, slowly pushing it to a vertical position.
- The red stone pukao was added once the moai was in place.
- The final stage was to add the eyes, made of white coral and obsidian.