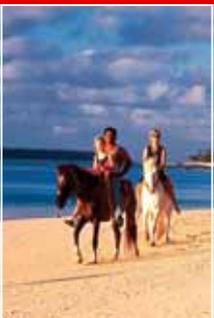
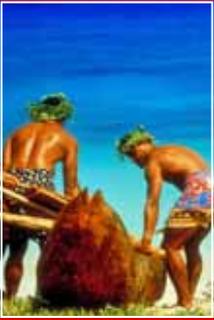


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The Kingdom of Tonga

The Kingdom of Tonga is the oldest and last remaining monarchy of ancient Polynesia. The Kingdom of Tonga is located in the heart of the South Pacific, between Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands, Tonga comprises 176 islands, of which only 42 are inhabited. The tiny islands are spread across 700,000 square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean and divided into 4 main groups.

Tongatapu Island group, where the capital Nuku'alofa is situated, is the largest and most populated region. The raised atoll is relatively flat and has a reef-protected harbour. Tongatapu provides insight into Polynesian history, culture and traditions.

Ha'apai Island group, lies 160km north of Tongatapu (approx. a 40 minute flight). The curved archipelago of low-lying coral islands, with soaring volcanoes in the centre, has stunning white sand beaches, amazing coral reefs and colourful coral gardens.

Vava'u Island group, comprising 64 islands is 90km north of Ha'apai (approx. a 60 minute flight from Tongatapu). The majority of the islands are high and densely forested. Vava'u has an immense landlocked harbour and is a popular stop over for the yachters. Vava'u is one of the few places in the world where you can swim with the whales.

Niuas Islands are extremely remote and isolated. The volcanic islands lie a further 300km north of Vava'u.

The People: The Tongan population of approximately 100,000, is predominately Polynesian. They are a friendly and welcoming people who have retained many of their ancient traditions customs and culture. They enjoy a laidback pace of life that is very appealing. Tongan people are devout Christians and consider Sunday a sacred day for attending church services and perform family duties.

The Environment: Tonga offers a variety of spectacular landscapes including; low-lying coral atolls, pristine coral reefs, magnificent sandy beaches and blue lagoons, crystal clear water, dramatic volcanic landscapes and tropical rainforests home to a unique array of flora and fauna. The best time of year to visit Tonga is from April to November. December to March is the wet season and can be quite hot and humid.

The Whales: Each year from June through to October, over 100 humpback whales arrive in Tonga. The whales spend the Austral winter in the warm seas of Tonga, mating and bearing their young, before returning with their new born calves to their summer feeding grounds of Antarctica. Whale watching tours and swimming with the whales is available around Tongatapu, the Ha'apai Islands, Eua and the Vava'u Island group.

Things to do: Water temperatures of 23-30C, with visibility of up to 40m in some places, ensures spectacular swimming, snorkelling and diving at each of the major island groups. Tonga is one of the few places where you can swim with the whales, an experience to remember forever. Reef-break surfing is available on Tongatapu. Vava'u is a popular sailing spot and offers perfect conditions for sea kayaking. There is also trekking, nature walks, horse riding, scenic and historical tours to enjoy.



Photo © Steve Blume



Photo © Steve Blume



Tongatapu



Tongatapu, where the capital Nuku'alofa is situated, is the international gateway to your Tongan holiday experience. The relatively flat raised atoll has a network of bitumen roads making it easy to get around. The eastern side of the island has beautiful beaches and historical sites including, the ancient royal tombs of Mu'a and the Ha'amonga'a Maui Trilithon. The western side of the island boasts many natural landmarks and striking limestone formations along the south coast. Tongatapu offers a variety of hotels, resorts, shops, restaurants, banks, markets, as well as a range of activities and cultural tours.



Little Italy Hotel

Location: Situated along the Nuku'alofa waterfront, and within easy walking distance to the town and Royal Palace. The boutique hotel offers 22 rooms in a range of categories from standard rooms to ocean view rooms, with a private balcony.

Room amenities: All room categories offer air conditioning, tea and coffee making facilities, refrigerator, cable TV, phone and free wireless internet access.

Hotel Facilities: The hotel houses the popular Little Italy Restaurant and bar, tour and reception desks.



Liku' Alofa Beach Resort

Location: Located 20 minutes from town in 14 acres of tropical gardens.

The resort features 17 private fales (bungalows) with high-beamed ceilings.

Room amenities: Each fale has private bathroom facilities, ceiling fans, TV, fridge, tea / coffee making, phone and a patio to sit out and enjoy the sunsets.

Hotel facilities: Restaurant, bar, ocean pool, volleyball courts and cultural shows.



Royal Tongan International Hotel

Location: Located close to the airport and only 17 km from the town centre. Formally known as the Airport Hotel, the recently renovated Royal Tongan Hotel offers 75 spacious guest rooms and deluxe suites with balconies overlooking the garden or pool area.

Room amenities: The air conditioned rooms have private bathroom facilities, fridge, tea and coffee making, safe box, sky TV, IDD phone and internet.

Hotel facilities: Restaurant and bar, conference rooms and barbecue area.

Deep Blue Diving

Deep Blue Diving, located at Faua Wharf, is Tongatapu's professional dive operator. They also service the island of Eua.

Tongatapu diving offers fantastic visibility of up to 40 metres in some places. Visit the local coral reefs, or take a day trip and explore the outer reefs, canyons, caves and drop offs. On each dive it's possible to encounter; the white tip reef shark, leopard sharks, lobsters, eels, turtles and schools of fish including; puffer fish, parrot fish, napoleon and snapper.

Eua Island is located 17.5 km off the south-east coast of Tongatapu and is a nature lovers dream. The relatively undiscovered divers paradise has one of the largest underwater caves in the Pacific. On sunny days the cave puts on a spectacular light show. You may also encounter schools of big fish tuna, sharks and turtles. With amazing visibility, colourful coral reefs, drift dives, drop offs, wrecks and diving with humpback whales, Eua has everything to excite even the fussiest diver.



Things to do:

Swimming with the Whales:

Each year the waters of Tonga play host to the magnificent humpback whales.

During the migration path, from June to October, you can spot these incredible mammals travelling with their young.

Tonga is one of only a few places in the world that allows people, accompanied by a guide, to get into the water and experience the joy of swimming near these amazing creatures.

Scuba Diving:

The surrounding reefs of Nuku'alofa offers drift dives and wall diving. On display is a variety of soft and hard coral beds, colourful marine life and schools of trevally and barracuda.

The spectacular cathedral caves in 'Eua are the largest in the South Pacific. With visibility of up to 40 meters, you can enjoy diving with schools of tuna, big fish and yellow fins. The caves also offer amazing light shows and access through to neighbouring caves.

Snorkelling:

Snorkelling expedition day trips to the nearby islands can be arranged.

Fishing:

The rich, warm waters of Tonga provides a habitat for swordfish, marlin, snapper, tuna and many other deep sea fish. Line fishing and boat charters are available.

You can also participate in spear-fishing.

Kayak Tours:

Immerse yourself in nature while paddling through the crystal clear waters between the islands. Full or half day guided kayak tours are available.

Tours:

There are a number of scenic and historical tours to enjoy. Sites to visit include Ha'amonga and the Royal tombs of Mua. Also don't miss the blow holes and the flying foxes on the western side of the island.

Island day trips:

Enjoy an excursion to the beautiful island of Fafa, located approximately a 35 minute boat ride from Tongatapu.

Fafa Island

Fafa Island Resort is located 7km north of Nuku'alofa, approximately a 30 minute boat ride. The 18 acre, palm-tree covered island is surrounded by a coral reef and has a turquoise lagoon offering perfect conditions for swimming and snorkeling. The deserted white sandy beaches invite the visitor to stroll along or just laze around in the sun. Fafa Island Resort is set out like a traditional Polynesian village and is the only property on the island. The resort has 13 guest bungalows (fales) featuring soaring high ceilings and built entirely from natural materials: palm poles, wooden shingles, coconut thatch and palm timber floors. Surrounded by lush tropical gardens the fales are set apart from each other ensuring privacy and offering unobstructed ocean views and a private beach. Fafa Island offers the visitor a luxurious "Robinson Crusoe style" hideaway.



Fafa Island Resort

Location: Set in tropical gardens along the beachfront the resort offers 13 guest bungalows. The traditional Polynesian fales are set apart for ensured privacy. There are no TV's or telephones.
Room Amenities: Each fale has a private courtyard with a semi-open bathroom and shower in the flower garden. The spacious fale has a king size bed, dressing room, ceiling fans and a covered veranda area. A hammock and beach beds are provided for outdoor leisure.
Hotel Facilities: Restaurant, cocktail bar, use of paddle boats and snorkeling equipment.

Things to do:

Snorkelling:

The Island is protected by a coral reef and the calm, crystal clear lagoon is ideal for swimming and snorkelling.

Diving:

Diving with a professional local operator can be arranged. There is a variety of excellent dive sites around Nuku'alofa.

Non motorized activities:

Paddleboards and snorkel gear is provided free of charge. Two small sail boats and catamaran are available for hire.

Eua Island



Things to do:

Diving:

Eua offers some of the best cave diving in the South Pacific. Fantastic visibility and big fish action.

Whale watching:

Whale season is from July to October, The whales can be spotted from land or small boats.

Snorkelling and Island Tours:

Snorkel in the pristine waters of uninhabited islands. Other popular activities include; trekking, rock climbing, caving, horse riding and cycling.

Fishing:

Local fishermen will guide you to the best spot to cast your line in.

Eua Island is a destination for the more adventurous traveller and is at the centre for eco-tourism in Tonga. Just a ten minute flight from the main island, Tongatapu, Eua is the most elevated and oldest island in the group. Ancient Polynesian traditions are still practiced in the villages and where the women make their elaborate tapa cloth, weave baskets and mats and ta'ovala (wearable mats). Eua offers unique geographical characteristics, from the dramatic cliff faces along the east coast to the low-lying beaches on the western side of the island. The National Park is the largest in Tonga and has some amazing treks through the lush tropical rainforest. The snorkelling and diving around Eua is spectacular with its crystal clear water, colourful coral reefs and prolific marine life. Eua also boasts the largest underwater cave in the South Pacific.



The Hideaway

Location: Located near the ocean's edge and surrounded by sandy beaches, The Hideaway is a popular accommodation choice on Eua. The 8 room property is low key with a relaxed atmosphere.
Room amenities: The rooms are fairly basic with private bathroom facilities and ceiling fans.
Resort facilities: The Hideaway has a communal bar and restaurant providing a variety of Tongan and European meals. Self catering facilities are also available. Trekking and hiking tours, horse riding, 4wd tours and bike hire are available.



Vava'u

The **Vava'u Island** group is a 60 minute flight from Tongatapu. Of the 64 islands in the group, 31 remain uninhabited. The majority of the islands are quite high and densely forested. Protected by coral reefs and fringed by white sandy beaches and blue lagoons, the Vava'u Islands are a haven for water-sports enthusiasts. The sheltered Port of Refuge in Neiafu, the capital, is a favourite stop-over for many of the world's yachties. With average water temperatures of 26C and visibility of up to 40 metres, diving, snorkelling, swimming, kayaking and game fishing are popular activities all year round. From July through to October, the humpback whales frolic with their young in the warm, clear waters of Vava'u. Vava'u is one of the few places in the world where visitors can experience swimming with these magnificent creatures.



Puataukanave International Hotel

Location: Located in Neiafu and overlooking the Port of Refuge Harbour and surrounding islands in the distance.

Room amenities: The hotel offers 47 rooms ranging from suites, to super deluxe rooms. There is also a 16 bed, backpacker-style dormitory. Some of the rooms are air conditioned, while others are fan cooled.

Hotel facilities: The hotel facilities include a waterfront restaurant and bar, swimming pool and tennis court. Other services include laundry and internet services.



Vava'u Harbourview Resort

Location: Situated 2 km from the town of Neiafu, on the shores of Port of Refuge Harbour.

Room amenities: Spacious bungalows, set in tropical gardens with harbour views. Each bungalow offers private bathroom, queen and single bed, sitting area, kitchenette with fridge and cooking facilities and private veranda.

Hotel facilities: There is a licensed restaurant and bar on the premises, however, it doesn't open on a daily basis. The resort has a BBQ area and a tennis court with racquets and balls supplied. Bicycle hire and land tours can be arranged.



Mystic Sands Beachfront Bungalows

Location: Located on a sandy beach, just a 10 minute drive from Neiafu.

Room amenities: 4 spacious, western-style units with private veranda overlooking the beach. Each unit has private bathroom facilities, ceiling fans and a kitchenette with stove, fridge and cookware.

Hotel facilities: There are no restaurant services at Mystic Sands however, the Tongan Beach Resort is just a short walk up the beach and has a restaurant and bar facilities that guests can utilise. Car, bike and scooter hire is available.

Diving - Vava'u is surrounded by beautiful coral reefs encompassing over fifty dive sites, with more still to be discovered. Visibility is between 25 - 40 metres and the water temperature ranges between 24° C to 28° C. The variety of dive sites include; soft and hard corals, underwater caves, walls, over-hangs, gorgonian fans and a diverse fish life. Added to this is the possibility of hearing and seeing the magnificent humpback whales, frolicking in Vava'u's clear blue waters.

Some popular dive sites:

China Town: Pagoda-like coral formations that are covered with multi-hued tube worms. An easy swim up a gully brings you to a bright red anemone, home to the clown fish family, that dart in and around the bed of green lettuce coral.

Mariner's Cave: An airtight chamber that gets its oxygen from a solution contained in the water. Divers enter the chamber at 16.5 meters while snorkellers can enter at 2 meters, then swim the 6.5 meters in. A ledge on the outside offers small nudibranchs for aficionados.



Photo © Steve Blume

Things to do:

Swim with the Whales:

The annual migration of the humpback whales from Antarctica to the warmer waters of Tonga, occurs each year. Visitors have the opportunity to observe and swim with these magnificent creatures of the deep.

Snorkelling:

Explore the coral reefs of the many uninhabited, surrounding islands. Snorkel with the whales. (seasonal)

Diving:

The wide range of dive sites offer hard and soft corals, walls, overhangs, underwater caves, gorgonian fans and a diverse fish life.

Kayaking:

The protected calm waterways provide ideal conditions for sea kayaking.

Cultural Tours:

Most hotels and resorts can assist you with tours around the island.

Game Fishing:

Some of the world's best big game fish action is available around Vava'u. Marlin, yellowfish tuna and many other pelagic species are found in these waters.



Vava'u



Photo © Steve Blume



Tongan Beach Resort

Location: Set on a fabulous beachfront location with ideal conditions for swimming and snorkelling.

Room amenities: The resort consists of 12 recently refurbished rooms. Each room is nicely furnished and has private bathroom facilities, deck area, ceiling fans, fridge and tea / coffee making facilities.

Hotel facilities: The resort has a traditional-style restaurant and bar, a small library and gift shop. The use of snorkelling gear and kayaks is available for guests.



The Reef Resort

Location: This boutique resort is located on a tranquil island overlooking the beach.

Room amenities: The resort features 4 well appointed, air conditioned bungalows, with fantastic sea views. All bungalows have private bathroom facilities, fridge, tea / coffee making facilities and private deck area.

Hotel facilities: The restaurant is located right on the beach. A well stocked bar offers a variety of imported alcoholic beverages. The use of kayaks and snorkelling gear is available for guests.



Photo © Kevin Deacon

Whale Watching and Swimming with the whales-

Humpback Whales are renowned for their enormous size, powerful aerial displays and legendary "whale songs." Each year over 100 of these magnificent creatures leave the cold waters of Antarctica and head north to the warm waters of Tonga, in order to mate and birth their young. The whales start arriving in Tonga around June and remain up until late October. The waters surrounding Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u provide a safe haven for the whales. The mother whales frolic about with their newborn calves while preparing them for the long journey back to Antarctica. Tonga is one of only few places in the world that allows humans to get up close and personal with the whales. Swimming with these amazing mammals in the crystal clear waters of Tonga is a highly emotive experience that you will remember forever. You can observe the whales in their natural habitat whilst snorkeling nearby, or view them from the comfort of a boat. Tongan Law permits that a maximum of four people, along with a trained guide, to enter the water at any one time and swim at a safe distance with the whales. The whales appear just as curious about humans as we are about them. They observe and show off their calves to the "strange creatures", who have ventured into their world.



Ha'apai

The Ha'apai Island group is one of Tonga's best kept secrets. The Ha'apai group consists of 60 small islands and only 17 of these, inhabited. Ha'apai is a wonderful eco-tourism destination, with its prolific wildlife, pristine beaches and magnificent coral reefs, it's a paradise for snorkellers and divers. It was in these waters that the famous "Mutiny on The Bounty" took place, and also where Captain Cook once landed, later referring to the Kingdom of Tonga as "The Friendly Islands". Take a step back in time, enjoy the peace and tranquillity and discover the beauty of Ha'apai. Flights to the main island of Lifuka operate daily, with the exception of Sunday. At the northern point of Lifuka, a causeway joins it to the island of Foa. This is where the accommodation is located.



Sandy Beach Resort

Location: Situated along a beautiful secluded beach at the northern end of Foa Island.

Room amenities: The resort offers 12 bungalows accommodating up to 24 guests at any one time. Each fale has a spacious veranda, island décor with a tiled floor, private bathroom facilities, ceiling fan, tea and coffee making facilities and fridge.

Hotel facilities: The resort has a restaurant and bar for in-house guests. Snorkelling equipment and canoes are available for hire. The dive shop is conveniently located at the resort.



Matafonua Lodge

Location: Set amongst lush tropical vegetation and surrounded on 3 sides by the crystal clear waters of Ha'apai.

Room amenities: The lodge consists of 10 traditional-styled Polynesian fale. The timber fale are raised off the ground and are furnished with a queen size bed, mosquito nets, 240v power, deck chairs and table. Bathroom facilities are shared.

Hotel facilities: The lodge has its own restaurant and bar overlooking the reef pass. Diving can be arranged with the nearby dive operator.



Diving - Ha'apai boasts some of the clearest waters in Tonga, with visibility ranging between 30-40 meters. Numerous snorkelling and dive sites are available within the sheltered lagoon and on the surrounding barrier reef. For the more experienced diver Ha'apai offers caves, canyons, caverns, tunnels and walls that feature brightly coloured corals like the incredible coral "Arch of Ofalanga". Hard corals dominate the reefs throughout Ha'apai, although soft corals and gorgonian fans are also well represented. The complex, underwater cave systems feature huge sea caves, tunnels and exciting drift dives as well as the famous drop off at "Green Wall" and the "Hot springs Cave". You will encounter a huge variety of tropical reef fish as well as pelagics such as sharks, tuna and barracuda. During the months from July to October humpback whales are also spotted passing through the waters of the Ha'apai Islands.



Photo © Steve Blume

Things to do:

Scuba Diving:

Ha'apai offers a variety of dive sites including; coral reefs, caves, canyons, walls and drop offs. The visibility is amazing and the fish life prolific.

Whale Watching:

During whale season (July to October) you can observe these gentle giants of the deep up close from either a boat or if you are lucky you can swim with them.

Snorkelling:

Enjoy snorkelling along the barrier reef in the crystal clear, sheltered waters of the blue lagoon.

Kayaking Tours:

The fantastic clarity of Ha'apai's waters allows kayakers to view the variety of corals and fish life below. It is not uncommon for friendly dolphins to show up to accompany the tour.

Horse Riding:

Enjoy a guided horse ride trail through the jungle or along a deserted beach. Trail rides take approximately 2.5 hours. A small hire fee, that goes directly to the local villagers, is required.

Bush and nature walks:

Guided nature walks, approximately 2 hours duration, are a great way to learn more about the natural habitat of the islands. It also allows insight into the way of life of the Ha'apai people.



Tonga



Photo © Kevin Deacon

Travel Tips

Passport: All visitors to Tonga must hold a current passport with a minimum validity of 6 months as well as a return or onward travel ticket.

Entry and Visa Requirements (subject to change):

U.S. British Commonwealth and most E.E.C visitors do not require a visa prior to entry for stays of up to 31 days.

International country code for Tonga is 676.

Time: Tonga is 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

Medical and Health Requirements:

There are no known health risks in Tonga however, it is recommended to consult your medical practitioner prior to travel for any personal medical precautions you may need to take. (For further details contact Travel Vax on 1300 360 164).

Currency: The currency in Tonga is Pa'anga (TOP) also known as the Tongan dollar. Foreign exchange is available at most banks and major hotels in the main towns. Visa, MasterCard and Amex credit cards are accepted at most hotels. Banking hours are 9.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday with some opening on Saturday mornings. Times may vary between islands.

Electricity: 240 volts AC, Plug I – same as Australia.

Language: Tongan is the official language however, English is widely spoken and used in formal meetings.

Duty Free: The allowance is 2 cartons (500g of tobacco) and 2.5 litres spirit or 4.5 litres wine or beer.

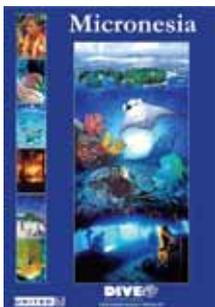
Clothing: Emphasis is on light-weight, casual clothing, although not too brief in public places. Swimwear is not permitted in the public areas of hotels. Cover up with light cotton clothing at dusk and dawn to prevent mosquito bites. Sun protection is essential.

Weather: Tonga enjoys a more comfortable climate and is slightly cooler than most tropical areas. It receives less rain than other tropical areas and has an average temperature of 26°C from May to October. The wetter and more humid season is from November to April with temperatures rising up to 32°C.

Tipping: Tipping is not expected or encouraged.

Departure Tax: There is currently no local departure tax payable in Tonga.

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