

Tonga

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Best Eco-Accommodation

- » 'Eua'iki Island Eco-Resort (p461)
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Best Cafes

- » Friends Café (p439)
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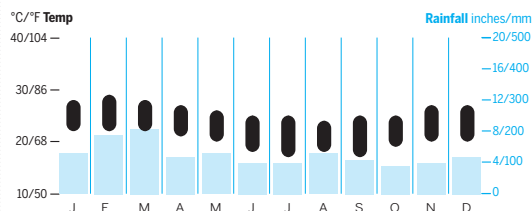
Why Go?

Say goodbye to tourist hype – you're now in the Kingdom of Tonga. This is a country that survives on international aid and remittances sent from Tongans living overseas. You may get the impression that most Tongans would prefer visitors to donate their dollars and not leave the airport; expats seem determined to build a tourist industry, but most of the locals just don't seem to care. In some ways, this is incredibly refreshing and in others incredibly frustrating. You won't have to try to gain a cultural experience – it's all around.

There's no doubting the natural beauty of Tonga. Travellers choose the pace of their adventure here, mixing sun-and-sand holidays with unique and intrepid experiences. Throw away any preconceived ideas, slow down to the pace of local life, and you'll love the place. Expect too much and you'll likely go away frustrated.

When to Go

Nuka'alofa



Jun–Oct Hump-back whales frolic in the waters throughout Tonga. A rare chance to swim with whales!

May–Oct The cooler, dryer, less humid season when yachties turn up to play.

Nov–Apr Warm and wet but fine for water sports. Cyclone season, but they rarely hit Tonga.

Connections

Most visitors fly into Tonga's only international airport on the main island of Tongatapu. From there, air is the fastest and most comfortable way to head to the other islands. Chathams Pacific is the sole domestic airline, offering friendly, reliable service and various options with its Kingdom air passes.

After Tonga's disastrous ferry tragedy of 2009, visitors may balk at the idea of boarding a boat. The good news is that a new ferry, donated by the Japanese government, now plies the waters between Tongatapu and Vava'u (via Ha'apai) weekly. Other ferries connect Tongatapu with nearby 'Eua.

Boat travel is the way to reach outer islands in Ha'apai and Vava'u.

ITINERARIES

One Week

After a bit of recovery time in Friends Café in Nuku'alofa, explore the main island of Tongatapu and its sights. This is easiest as part of an island day tour. Fly north to Vava'u and experience this magical group of islands, beaches, reefs and turquoise waterways. All sorts of water activities and adventures await. Fly back to Tongatapu the day before your international flight out.

Two weeks

With a bit more time, throw in a visit to Ha'apai on your way back south from Vava'u. One of Tonga's best-kept secrets, the islands of Ha'apai offer plenty to the intrepid traveller. Once back on Tongatapu, make the effort to visit 'Eua, a unique ecotourism destination known for its hiking, rainforest and red shining parrot.

One Month

Consider using ferries to get between islands and slip into 'Tonga time'. A stay out at Ha'atafu Beach is a great option on Tongatapu. Lengthen your stays in Vava'u, Ha'apai and on 'Eua. A trip to the Niuas could even be on the cards.

Top Tonga Travel Tips

- » Patience is a virtue...and Tongan time is a flexible entity! Slow down.
- » Respectful dress is important to Tongans.
- » Swimsuits should be worn only at resorts. Tongans swim fully dressed.
- » Tongan law prohibits being in a public place without a shirt.
- » 'Keeping face' is extremely important in Tonga. If things don't meet your expectations, don't make things worse by waving and shouting about it.
- » Tonga closes down on Sundays.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Tongan pa'anga (T\$)

Language Tongan, English

Mobile phones Good coverage.

Money ATMs on Tongatapu, Vava'u only; banks open Monday to Friday.

Visas 31 days for most nationalities without a visa.

Fast Facts

- » **Capital** Nuku'alofa
- » **Country code** 676
- » **Emergency** 911
- » **Land area** 747 sq km
- » **Population** 106,000

Exchange Rates

Australia	AU\$1	T\$1.80
Canada	C\$	T\$1.75
Europe	€1	T\$2.25
Japan	¥100	T\$2.25
New Zealand	NZ\$	T\$1.45
UK	UK£1	T\$2.80
USA	US\$1	T\$1.80

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** T\$60
- » **Two-course evening meal** T\$25
- » **Beer at a bar** T\$6
- » **Whale-watching tour** T\$250
- » **Tongatapu-Vava'u flight** T\$230