

Wallis & Futuna

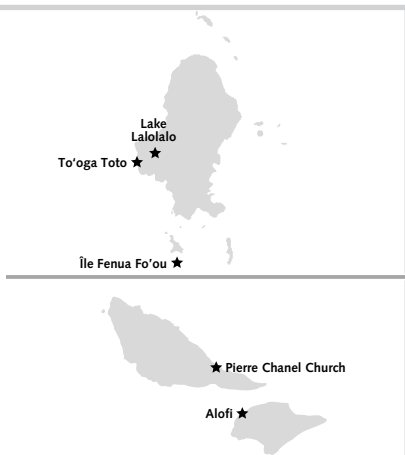
Wallis and who? No it's not Gromet. These two little-known volcanic specks lie smack in the centre of Polynesia/Melanesia far from the modern world and its claymation comedies. Wallis and Futuna's French-funded economy allows islanders to drive flashy 4WDs to and from their taro fields and enjoy satellite TV at night after a beer or some kava, but the culture and its intricate *coutume* (customs) have remained remarkably intact. Catholicism, however, is deeply intertwined with every part of daily life.

The population is equal parts proud and protective of their way of life and, as long as the airfares and cost of living stay as high as they are (this place makes Tahiti seem cheap), it's not likely to receive heaps of honeymooners or package tourists any time soon. Movements for independence are few: the hospitals, schools and highly paid government jobs are all welcome enough additions that the people don't mind putting up with a few handfuls of French expats.

Wallis and Futuna, which lie 230km away from each other, are linked through French colonialism, period. Wallis has ancestral connections with Tonga, while Futuna traces its roots to Samoa. This is evident in the languages, which are quite different, although mutually comprehensible, as well as the Samoan-like tapa designs of the Futunans and the Tongan-influenced designs found on Wallis. The two islands remain competitive with each other, but Wallis, being more populous and the centre of government, retains the upper hand.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit Wallis' paradisaical lagoon islets like **Île Fenua Fo'ou** (p617)
- Gaze down the steep walls of Wallis' **Lake Lalolalo** (p617)
- Find shards of Lapita pottery in the king's path at **To'oga Toto** (p617) on Wallis
- Marvel at the imposing tower and graceful tapa decorations at **Pierre Chanel Church** (p619) on Futuna
- Laze around on a perfect, empty beach on **Alofi** (p618)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

It's not surprising that tropical Wallis and Futuna are markedly hot and humid. The sweatiest months are between November and March, while more temperate weather can be expected from April to October. Rain is likely at least 260 days of the year; Wallis averages an impressive 3m of rainfall a year, while Futuna gets a lush 4m on average. Both islands experience occasional cyclones (the season is May to October). The most destructive recorded cyclone was Raja, which ravaged the islands in 1986. For Pacific climate charts, see p627.

COSTS & MONEY

Wallis and Futuna use the Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP), which is tied to the euro. There is only one ATM in the country and two banks. Costs are high, so be prepared to spend a minimum of around 14,000 CFP per day, excluding car hire or activities. All lodging choices fall into what could be considered 'midrange,' (between 10,000 and 16,000 CFP); there are no budget or top-end options. For more details, see p621.

HISTORY

Wallis and Futuna were populated when the great Lapita settlement wave moved across the Pacific between 1500 BC and 500 BC. Objects found on Futuna have been dated to 800 BC, although it's probable there are even older sites. Later Futuna came under the influence of Samoa, while Wallis suffered repeated invasions from Tonga, starting around AD 1400. Today Tongan forts are some of the only remaining archaeological sites on Wallis.

The Dutch explorers Jacques Le Maire and Willem Schouten chanced upon Futuna in 1616 and named the island Hoorn, after their home port. The next visitor, the English navigator Samuel Wallis who had recently discovered Tahiti, arrived at Uvea in 1767 and the island was named after him – only this time the name stuck.

In the first half of the 19th century the islands became popular stops for whaling ships, followed by traders, *bêche-de-mer* gatherers and, inevitably, missionaries. The first Catholic Marist missionaries, including Pierre Bataillon on Wallis and Pierre Chanel on Futuna, arrived in 1837. Chanel was murdered in 1841 by King Niuluki, an action that

WALLIS & FUTUNA FACTS

Capital city (and island) Mata'Utu (Wallis)

Population 13,480

Land area 247 sq km

International telephone code 681

Currency Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)

Languages Wallisian, Futunan and French

Greeting *Malo* (Wallisian), *Maro* (Futunan), *Bonjour* (French)

Website www.oultre-mer.gouv.fr/?-wallis-et-futuna.html, in French

was to make Pierre Chanel the Pacific's first saint (see boxed text, opposite). In the second half of the century France gradually began to assume control of the islands, officially taking control over the years 1886 to 1888.

Things remained quiet until WWII when Wallis and Futuna was the only French colony to side with the collaborationist Vichy government, despite pressure from New Caledonia. The arrival of war in the Pacific ended that phase and in May 1942 the 5000 Wallisians suddenly found 2000 American forces coming ashore. Airstrips were built – the one at Hihifo is still in use today. At its peak there were 6000 Americans on Wallis and their presence deeply influenced traditional culture.

Wallis and Futuna officially became a French Territoire d'Outre-Mer (Overseas Territory) on 29th July 1961. These days there appears to be little local sentiment in favour of independence from France.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Despite French presence and devout Catholicism, Wallis and Futuna are still very steeped in local tradition. Day-to-day life is dictated by a rigid social and class structure. The ruling class, the *aliki*, make all the decisions and hold most of the important jobs. The king is elected from one of the upper-class families by the *aliki*, and as long as he (or she as is sometimes the case on Wallis but never on Futuna) manages to represent the other classes in a satisfactory manner and share the wealth, they will win continued support. Because there are several royal, *aliki* families the power has always remained balanced, shifting to a new king and/or family when popular demand asked for a change. This remains true on Futuna (where there are two