

Overview of Tonga

Referred to by Captain Cook as the 'Friendly Islands', Tonga spreads south of Samoa for 500 miles (800km) and is a window into authentic Polynesian life. Consisting of 170-odd islands, the country is the Pacific's last monarchy and the only Pacific nation never to be colonised. Tongans are fiercely proud of their history and culture, with this deep passion making Tonga a wonderful travel destination for those seeking a tropical beach bliss.

After a brief period of riots and political turmoil in 2006, when locals rose up in protest against a new monarch notorious for his lavish lifestyle, Tonga has reverted to its former peaceful and laid-back disposition, and the country is considered a safe and stable travel destination.

It is a choice location for watersports enthusiasts and a tranquil retreat for those needing a break from the crush of modern urban life. Visitors often make use of yacht charters to explore the islands of Vava'u and Neiafu, while snorkelling close to shore and diving around phenomenal coral reefs. The archipelago is also a celebrated surfing destination, but the reef breaks typical of the islands are not necessarily suitable for novices. The presence of humpback whales in Tongan waters also make it a sought-after winter holiday destination.

The Tongan people are friendly and the culture relaxed, with traditional Christian values predominating alongside older Polynesian customs. The capital and commercial centre of Nuku'alofa bears testament, with a blend of western and traditional influence evident in the vibrant markets thriving alongside crumbling colonial buildings and numerous churches. The capital city is on the main island of Tongatapu, which is home to about 70 percent of the population and usually the first port of call for travellers before seeking out the less populated islands where pristine beaches and chilled resorts beckon.

Despite the obvious appeal of the archipelago as an idyllic island getaway, Tonga remains largely unblemished by large-scale tourist development and has not been overrun by package tourists. This may be discouraging for those looking for luxury, but the ultimately unpolished nature of the islands is the main charm for many visitors.

Key Facts

Language:

The official languages are Tongan and English.

Passport/Visa:

Visitors must hold documents and tickets for their return or onward journey and sufficient funds to cover their stay. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The currency in Tonga is the pa'anga (TOP), which is divided into 100 seniti. ATMs are available in the capital city Nuku'alofa and in the main towns of 'Eua, Vava'u and the Ha'apai island groups; remote island groups have limited banking services. Credit card fraud and card skimming occurs, so visitors should avoid exposing their PIN when using ATMs.

Electricity:

Electrical current in Tonga is 220 to 240 volts, 50Hz. Australian-style plugs with three rectangular prongs are standard.

Travel to Tonga

Climate in Tonga

Despite the huge distance from the north of the country to the south, the climate in Tonga is relatively steady, with only mild differences in temperature between the warm Vava'u and Niuas and the noticeably cooler Eua. The climate in Tonga is divided between the dry season (May to October) and the wet season (November to April), with temperatures maintaining an average of 78F (26C) throughout the year. March is the wettest month in Tonga, and most rain falls at night, with hot, humid days. Tropical storms in Tonga are most likely to occur between November and March. The best time to travel to Tonga is during the dry season, when most of the festivals are held. While prices generally stay steady throughout the year, tourists travelling to Tonga in the December to January holiday period should book flights and accommodation well in advance.

Health Notes when travelling to Tonga

All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines, and there has been an increase in dengue fever cases recorded in Vava'u, so visitors should take measures to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Medical facilities are limited in Tonga and comprehensive travel insurance is advised; travellers should take all required medication with them.

Safety Notes when travelling to Tonga

Most visits to Tonga are trouble free, as the crime rate is low. However, petty crime and theft do take place, so visitors should remain vigilant, especially at night.

Customs in Tonga

Tonga is predominantly Christian and locals are generally very conservative; modest dress is expected outside of hotels. When greeting a stranger, a handshake is appropriate, but family members will press their noses together and exhale loudly. It is acceptable to eat with the hands, and it is customary to wash the hands before and after meals. Sundays are reserved mainly for religious worship and many restaurants and shops will be closed. Homosexuality is technically illegal and the law is occasionally enforced; same-sex partners should avoid public displays of affection.

Duty Free in Tonga

Visitors to Tonga over the age of 18 may import 250 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of loose tobacco; and 2.25 litres of spirits or 4.5 litres of wine or beer. All plant and animal products must be declared.

Doing Business in Tonga

Tongans have a relaxed approach to time, so foreigners should be prepared for the possibility of prearranged meeting times and standard opening hours to be disregarded. Appropriate attire for business meetings includes long pants for men or long skirts for women, and a collared shirt that covers the shoulders and chest. If in doubt, foreigners should tend toward modesty. Tongans often appreciate it when people show an interest in their well-being, family and culture, so it's worth beginning the meeting with small talk. Patience is necessary to facilitate the best working relationship, as meetings and decision-making usually progress quite slowly.

Communication in Tonga

The international access code for Tonga is +676. Travellers can purchase prepaid SIM cards for unlocked phones; WiFi is available at hotels and restaurants.

Tipping in Tonga

Tipping isn't expected but it's always appreciated.

Passport/Visa Note

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. American citizens can obtain a tourist visa on arrival for a maximum stay of 31 days.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian citizens can obtain a tourist visa on arrival for a maximum stay of 31 days.

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Canadian citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. Canadians can obtain a tourist visa on arrival; the visa is valid for 31 days.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. British citizens can obtain a visa for touristic purposes on arrival; the visa is valid for 31 days.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. Tourist visa are available to Australians upon arrival in Tonga, these visas are valid for 31 days.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. Irish nationals are able to get a 'visitors visa' on arrival in Tonga, these visas are valid for 31 days. Visitors must hold documents and tickets for their return/onward journey and sufficient funds to cover their stay.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

NZ citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required. New Zealand citizens can obtain a 'visitors visa' on arrival, for touristic purposes. Visitors visas are valid for 31 days. Visitors must hold documents and tickets for their return/onward journey and sufficient funds to cover their stay.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

SA citizens require a passport that is valid on arrival. A visa is required.

Tourist Offices

Tonga Tourism Authority, Nuku'alofa: +676 25334 or info@tourism-tonga.com

Tonga Embassies

In the United States:

Tongo Consulate General, San Francisco, United States: (650) 685 1001

In the United Kingdom:

Tongan High Commission, London, United Kingdom: 020 7724 5828

In Australia:

Tongan High Commission, Canberra, Australia: (+61) 26232 4806

Foreign Embassies in Tonga

American Embassy

U.S. Embassy in Tonga, Suva, Fiji: (679) 331-4466

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy in Tonga, Nuku'alofa, Tonga: 676 23-244

Australian Embassy

High Commission of Australia, Nuku'alofa, Tonga: 676 23 244

Currency

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Overview of the Attractions in Tonga

Public Holidays in Tonga

	2023	2024
Easter Monday	Wed. April 10	Mon. April 1
Anzac Day	Thu. April 25	Thu. April 25
Emancipation Day	Tue. June 4	Tue. June 4
Official Birthday of HM King Tupou VI	Thu. July 4	Thu. July 4