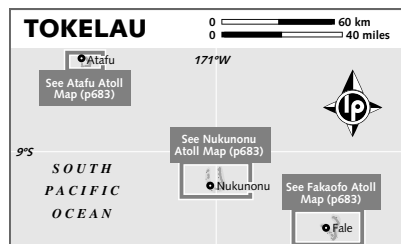


Tokelau

If you're into counting off countries, don't leave tiny Tokelau for last. This dot in the Pacific may well be gone, swallowed up by rising seas due to global warming, if you leave it too late.

Tokelau's name is Polynesian for north wind, and it's one of the most isolated places on earth. It takes 20 hours to sail there from its nearest neighbour, Samoa, and you can forget about flying – there's no airstrip. It's largely due to this remote factor that indigenous culture has been preserved on Tokelau to a far greater degree than elsewhere in the Pacific.

Each of Tokelau's three atolls – Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunonu – is a ribbon of tiny *motu* (islands) surrounding a lagoon. They're home to a small population of hardy souls who live an almost subsistence lifestyle in very crowded conditions.



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sitting just south of the equator, Tokelau is truly tropical, with an average temperature of 28°C and heavy but irregular rainfall. It's at the northern limit of the South Pacific cyclone zone, so tropical storms are rare but certainly not unknown – the most recent was Cyclone Percy in 2005.

The best months to travel to Tokelau are from April to October. Between November and January, ships are usually full of scholarship students and other Tokelauans living abroad, returning to spend Christmas with their families. December to March is cyclone season, when the trip from Samoa could be rough.

HISTORY

Tokelau's atolls have been populated by Polynesians for about 1000 years, but it wasn't until the 18th century that 'Tokelau' came to exist. A series of wars at this time united these previously fiercely independent atolls. At the end of the wars, Fakaofu had conquered Atafu and Nukunonu, bringing them under the rule of the god

Tui Tokelau and creating the first united entity of Tokelau.

Soon afterwards, Tokelau came to the attention of English and US ships sailing by. Whalers frequented the atolls in the 1820s, and in the middle of the 19th century missionary groups began devoting time to the spiritual wellbeing of the Tokelauans. From the 1840s to the 1860s, first Catholic, then Protestant missionaries from Samoa converted the people of the three atolls to Christianity.

Conversion was a mixed blessing. The French missionary Pierre Bataillon transported 500 reluctant Tokelauans to Wallis Island in the 1850s because he feared they would otherwise die of starvation. Then Peruvian slave traders seized about 250 people – half of the atolls' population – in the 1860s. The combined effect of missionaries, slaving and disease reduced Tokelau's population from 1000 to only 200. Desperate to save the remaining people, Tokelauans pleaded with the UK for protection as a British colony, and in 1889 Tokelau was annexed into the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Protectorate (see p734).

In the early 20th century, large numbers of Tokelauans left their homes to work the phosphate mines of Banaba (Ocean Island) in the Gilbert Islands (see p257). After New Zealand (NZ) took over responsibility for Tokelau in 1925, the flow of emigration shifted to Western Samoa (then also a NZ territory). Following Samoa's independence in 1962, Tokelauans relocated to NZ.

In recent years, Tokelau has been moving towards self-government in free association with NZ (like the Cook Islands and Niue), but a referendum in February 2006 failed to result in independence for the tiny territory. Despite this, government and administration has been increasingly based in Tokelau itself in the last decade or so, instead of in NZ and Samoa. Recent improvements in infrastructure have included the creation of a reliable telephone system and direct Internet services.

Tokelau's local government comprises three village councils called the *taupulega* – one on each atoll – made up of the heads of family (including women). Every three years, each atoll elects a *pulenuku* (village mayor) and a *faipule* (atoll representative), who form the Tokelau Executive Council.

POPULATION & AREA

Atoll	Pop	Land	Lagoon
Atafu	600	3.5 sq km	17 sq km
Fakaofu	550	4.0 sq km	50 sq km
Nukunonu	450	4.7 sq km	98 sq km

Annually, the position as Tokelau's *ulu o Tokelau* (head of government) rotates amongst the three atolls until the following election. Delegates from each atoll are also elected every three years to serve with the *pulenuku* and *faipule* on Tokelau's 21-member parliament, the General Fono. The number of delegates from each atoll is determined by population density, thus ensuring a representative government based on the varying size of each village.

In early 2005, Tokelau was hit not only by Cyclone Percy but also by a spring tide that inundated the villages of Fakaofu and Nukunonu. Homes were under a metre of seawater, and important crops such as coconuts and bananas were hard hit by the winds. Nobody was seriously injured, but the damage was extensive.

THE CULTURE

Tokelau's isolation from the rest of the world, as well as NZ's hands-off approach to its administration, has resulted in *faka Tokelau* (the Tokelauan way) being well preserved. However, the large numbers of Tokelauans living abroad has resulted in an ever-increasing awareness of the benefits of modern *palagi* (Western) culture – whether perceived or real.

Judith Huntsman and Antony Hooper's enormous *Tokelau – A Historical Ethnography* is the definitive text, telling you all you ever wanted to know about Tokelau and its people. With Allan Thomas and Ineleo Tuia, Huntsman has also compiled an interesting collection of tales called *Songs and Stories of Tokelau – An Introduction to the Cultural Heritage*.

Lifestyle

Partly because of the difficulty of travel between the atolls, Tokelau society is still compartmentalised into the three atolls and their (mainly) single village. The one name describes both the atoll and the village

(for example, Atafu Atoll/Atafu Village). *Maopoopo* (village unity) is paramount in Tokelau. Beyond that, each village is divided into two *faitu* – or sides – on a roughly territorial basis. The two sides compete enthusiastically in fishing, action songs, dancing, sports and, most importantly, *kilikiti* (village cricket).

The elderly are awarded enormous respect in Tokelau. Each *kau kaiga* (family group) is led by the *matai*, with the three *taupulega* (village councils of elders and *matai*) ordering daily life. Elders are expected to contribute to the community, both through attendance at the *taupulega* and by encouraging younger workers at their tasks.

Each village *taupulega* administers the *aumaga* (village workforce), which gathers fish, harvests crops and maintains village buildings. Almost all males over school age, except for public servants, join the *aumaga*. The female equivalent is the *komiti a fafine* (women's committee), whose job it is to ensure village cleanliness and health.

Under Tokelau's system of *inati* (sharing), resources are divided between families according to need. The *inati* system developed over the centuries out of necessity: in an environment where resources were so scarce, community cooperation was vital. Individualism is not a virtue in these circumstances, nor is it really an option.

Inati still operates – each day, the village's catch of fish is laid out on the beach and apportioned by the *taupulega* – but it is under increasing pressure from the cash economy. Steps have been taken to ensure that employed Tokelauans, mainly public servants, do not receive unfair benefits through this principle of sharing. There are only a dozen

TOKELAU FACTS

- **Capital city:** None
- **Population:** 1600
- **Land area:** 12 sq km
- **Number of atolls:** Three
- **International telephone code:** 690
- **Currency:** NZ dollar (NZ\$)
- **Languages:** Tokelauan, English and Samoan
- **Greeting:** *Malo ni* (Tokelauan)
- **Website:** www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/tokelau/country/tokelau.html

THE END?

Consisting only of low-lying coral atolls rising to a maximum of 5m, Tokelau faces great risk from global warming. It is predicted that all three atolls will be uninhabitable by the end of the 21st century, though some estimates give only another 30 years. While some Tokelauans regard these predictions as overly dramatic, others foresee the end of their 1000-year-old history. See p66 for more on the issue of global warming.

police officers in Tokelau, and no imprisonment system. In Tokelau's closely knit society, punishment takes the form of public rebukes, fines or labour.

Modern Tokelauan society survives due to foreign aid from NZ, which pumps in NZ\$9 million per year (or NZ\$5500 per head), swamping the gross domestic product of NZ\$1.5 million. Most revenue comes from fishing licence fees, copra, handicrafts and stamps; interest from an international trust fund complements these earnings. Tokelau's isolation adds to the country's financial woes – telecommunications and transport cost 25% of the yearly budget. All medical supplies, equipment and many foodstuffs are imported.

The public service is the main source of regular income for Tokelauans; these jobs are rotated among villagers and a village tax is imposed on wages. The other major source of income is from the *aumaga*. Payment for *aumaga* work, which was traditionally unpaid, provides an income for young Tokelauans who would otherwise have to look for work overseas. Remittances from Tokelauan relatives living away from home is another source of income.

While each atoll has a hospital, it's a fact of life for Tokelauans that any serious health problem can easily be life threatening – medical supplies are difficult to come by and specialist care is days away in Samoa.

Entertainment on the islands is limited to community discos on the three atolls. Expect lots of 'cold stuff' (beer), loud music and dancing. Although gambling for money is illegal, weekly bingo games are extremely

popular with women. Prizes include boxes of washing powder and bottles of shampoo.

Population

Tokelauans are Polynesian, closely related to Tuvaluans, Samoans and Cook Islanders. The liberal sprinkling of European surnames is the legacy of some enthusiastic whalers and beachcombers of the late 19th century.

Tokelau's islands are cramped beyond belief, even though emigration has relieved some of the population pressure. Tokelauans are mainly crowded into three small villages, each perched on the main *motu* of each atoll. Around 400 people live on Fakaofu's tiny (4-hectare) Fale Island; in fact, Fale's population density is one of the highest in the Pacific, and is such that the island's numerous *puaka* (domestic pigs) have been squeezed out to reside on the reef rather than on land. Fakaofu's second islet, Fenua Fala, has a smaller cluster of homes with a hospital, school and church.

Land shortages have long forced emigration from Tokelau, and most of the country's people live overseas, predominantly in Samoa, NZ and Australia. Almost 6500 Tokelauans live in NZ – four times as many as in Tokelau itself. They have maintained affinity and allegiance with their familial atolls and actively retain the language and culture of their homeland.

SPORT

Tokelauans play similar sports to Samoa and NZ; rugby, netball and *kilikiti* (the Polynesian form of village cricket) are popular. When playing *kilikiti*, each side fields as

many players as are available – on crowded Tokelau that means 50 per side is not uncommon. A shot into the ocean or lagoon is a confirmed 'six'.

RELIGION

Tokelau is a staunchly Christian country – the percentage of the population that does not belong to one of the two main churches is tiny. Sunday is devoted almost entirely to church activities, with time off for a large meal and a midday snooze. If you attend church while in Tokelau, the community will better accept you – and it will give you something to do on Sunday. Work and many activities are forbidden on Atafu and Fakaofu on Sunday; Nukunonu is less strict.

Tokelau's religious composition reflects the arrival of Samoan missionaries of different denominations during the 19th century: Atafu is almost completely Protestant, Nukunonu is largely Catholic, and Fakaofu, where Catholic and Protestant missionaries arrived almost simultaneously, is split between the two faiths. Interdenominational tension is all but unknown on Fakaofu, as it would run contrary to the supreme concept of *maoopo*.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, Tokelauans worshipped the god Tui Tokelau – personified in a slab of coral that still stands in the *fale fonu* on Fakaofu. The usual pantheon of Polynesian gods was also acknowledged in Tokelau.

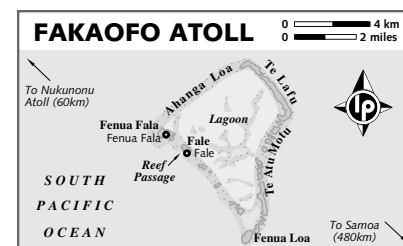
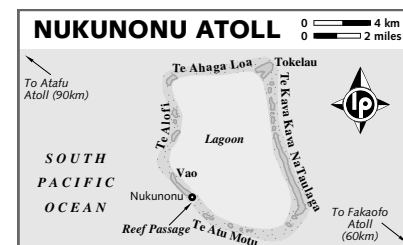
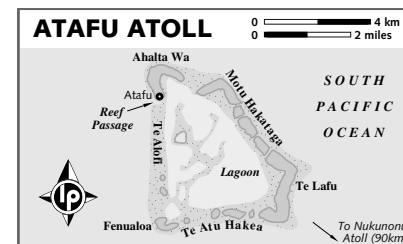
LANGUAGE

Tokelauan is a Polynesian language, closely related to Tuvaluan and Samoan. Because of frequent contact with NZ, most Tokelauans speak some English.

Tokelauan pronunciation is similar to other Polynesian languages, except that 'f' is pronounced as a soft 'wh', and 'g' is pronounced 'ng' (a soft sound) as in Samoan.

Tokelauan basics

Hello.	<i>Malo ni or Taloha</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tofaa.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ea mai koe?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Ko au e lelei.</i>
Please.	<i>Faka molemole.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Faka fetai.</i>
Yes.	<i>lo.</i>
No.	<i>Heai.</i>



ENVIRONMENT

Tokelau may not have an environment to worry about in another few decades – climate change and the associated rise in sea level are the two biggest environmental issues pressing this atoll nation (see the boxed texts, p681 and p66).

More immediate environmental concerns include the overexploitation of some fish and other marine species, as well as its (albeit tiny) forest resources. Due to the country's very limited acreage, waste disposal is also a big problem, as is the improper disposal of chemicals.

Geography

Tokelau's three small atolls lie roughly in a line, 480km north of their nearest neighbour and main link with the outside world, Samoa. The three atolls are separated not only from the rest of the world but from each other – it is 92km between Nukunonu

THE TOKELAUAN FALE

The traditional Tokelauan *fale* (house) has all but disappeared. Houses these days are built with sturdy concrete in the hope that modern materials will withstand cyclones more successfully than the traditional coral pebbles and wood. That said, many such homes were damaged during Cyclone Percy in 2005. With rain run-off from roofs being the major source of fresh drinking water, pandanus leaves have given way to corrugated iron as a roofing material.

More traditional Atafu still has a very small number of traditional *fale*, partly because that atoll has a better supply of the excellent building wood, *kanava*.

The largest and most ornate building on each atoll is the church – or three churches in Fakaofu's case. Other community focal points are the village cricket pitch and the *fale fonu* (village hall). One of the newest buildings in the country is Nukunonu's *fale fonu* – until recently this building was little more than a cargo shed but it is now an attractive, traditional *fale* located next to the administrative building. Fakaofu's *fale fonu* is also a traditional open-sided structure, whereas the one on Atafu is raised and enclosed by a wall and windows.

and Atafu, and 64km between Nukunonu and Fakaofu.

The trio are classic coral atolls: thin necklaces of small islets surrounding central lagoons (see p63). The low-lying islands have a maximum elevation of only 5m above sea level, and the land area is tiny, amounting to only 12.2 sq km across the three atolls. None of the 128 islets are more than 200m wide.

Ecology

Like all coral atolls, Tokelau's soil is thin, infertile and holds water poorly. Coconut and pandanus are the most common plant species; *kanava* is a tree popularly used for timber. Bananas, pawpaw, taro, breadfruit and other staple food crops grow on the islands. Migratory seabirds are common visitors to the atolls; otherwise, fauna consists of rats, lizards, poultry and the reef-exiled pigs.

FOOD & DRINK

The traditional method of cooking in Tokelau is the *umu* (earth oven), which will be familiar to anyone who has spent some time in the Pacific; they're most popular on Fakaofu. However, most households cook on kerosene stoves. The traditional diet of fish, *kumala* (sweet potato), breadfruit, taro, pigs and fowl is supplemented by the processed foods which are brought

in roughly every 12 days by cargo ship. Canned meat, also a mainstay of Pacific travellers, is in plentiful supply.

If you're staying with one of the accommodation establishments detailed on below, or with a local family, your food needs will be looked after. Processed food (and other supplies) can be bought from the small village-owned co-op stores on each atoll. Supplies of fresh fish, vegetables and drinking coconuts should be negotiated with someone from the *taupulega*.

As on all coral atolls, fresh water is scarce. The porous coral soil drains quickly, so despite the heavy rainfall there are few groundwater reserves except on Fakaofu. Instead, rainwater is collected from roofs into rainwater tanks. Tank water tends to taste somewhat brackish, perhaps explaining the preference for 'cold stuff' (beer). Coconuts are plentiful, but make sure you have permission before grabbing one to drink from – such resources are limited in Tokelau.

Beer, invariably Samoan and when available, is sold at the co-op stores on Fakaofu and Nukunonu; its sale is strictly rationed on more-traditional Atafu. Tokelau's isolation means that supplies of *hostuff* ('hot stuff'; spirits) and beer can be unreliable. *Kaleve*, made from fermented coconut sap, is also drunk.

TOKELAU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation on Tokelau must be arranged before arrival through the **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia; ✉ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) in Samoa. Official places to stay are very limited; you may be able to arrange accommodation in a private home but it won't be easy without contacts. Facilities are basic – all that is provided is a bed, meals and a bar.

Nukunonu Atoll has a relative goldmine of options, with two places to stay. **Luana Liki Hotel** (☎ 4140; full board NZ\$50) is a wonderfully friendly place with nine rooms. It is owned by retired teachers Luciano and Juliana Perez, and they will happily organise lagoon outings and snorkelling expeditions inside and outside the reef. The other alternative is one of the three self-catering rooms on

TOKELAU, AT LAST *Rowland Burley*

It took me nearly two years to get to Tokelau, but it was well worth the wait.

The first problem was communicating with TALO in laid-back Samoa. Emails would sometimes remain unanswered for weeks at a time, and their replies were often sparse at best. But eventually a sailing schedule materialised for the supply ships that make the eight-day trip from Apia around the islands, and I arranged my leave to coincide with one of them. As the months passed, I confirmed the departure date regularly but then, when it was far too late to alter my holiday plans, the sailing was moved forward by several days. I'd just have to wait till next year.

Over the following months, I went through the same painstaking process of finding the ship schedule and booking my leave – although this time I left several days clear both before and after the trip, in case the date changed again. And, of course, change it did, but this time by a whole week! Faced with having to wait another whole year, I eventually managed to scrounge some extra leave, and I was finally set to go.

In Apia, the folk at TALO couldn't have been nicer, and they reassured me that the ship really was still going, although I didn't actually believe it until we pulled away from the wharf. The 24 hours it took to get to Nukunonu would have been fine if the good ship *MV Lady Naomi* had been just a little more stable, but once we arrived, it was just perfect. I spent a whole week exploring the three atolls, with no vehicles and no tourists – the real Polynesia at last.

Rowland Burley is an inveterate traveller who has been to all the world's countries and most of its territories and island groups. Tokelau was one of the very last places he needed to visit, leaving only a couple of remote Pacific and Indian Ocean atolls before he can claim to having been everywhere.

the top floor of the **Fale Fono** (main administration building; ☎ 4139), but visiting officials often use them.

Atafu Atoll has one small **accommodation house** (☎ 2146; fax 2108), which is run by master fisherman Feleti Lopa.

On Fakaofu Atoll there are no official places to stay although TALO might be able to arrange something, should you have the urge to stay there.

If village life is a bit too claustrophobic, and you have a tent, consider moving out to one of the remote uninhabited islets for a quiet retreat. Remember that every single island in Tokelau, big or small, is owned by either a family or a village, and it's important to get permission to visit before you go.

ACTIVITIES

Diving and snorkelling both inside and outside the atolls' lagoons is fantastic. There is almost nothing in the way of search and rescue facilities though, so diving outside the reef should be undertaken with maximum caution. Talk to the locals to find out where the safest diving spots can be found. The nearest compression chamber is so far away (Fiji) that it might as well be on Mars.

Ask the local men if you can accompany them on fishing trips, but be aware that

they are working and won't always be able to accommodate your wishes.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Fakaofu (www.fakaofu.tk) Guide to the chiefly island of Tokelau.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/pacific/tokelau/) Tokelau profile.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/tokelau/country/tokelau.html) NZ government site, with an up-to-date Tokelau homepage.

Nukunonu (www.nukunonu.tk) Specific information about Nukunonu.

Tokelau Council of Ongoing Government (www.tokelau.org.nz) Support for Tokelau's move to self-determination continues, despite the 2006 referendum.

MONEY

The NZ dollar is the official currency, though Samoan tala will sometimes be accepted (for exchange rates see the Quick Reference page). There are no banks in Tokelau.

TELEPHONE

As part of the improved infrastructure necessary for eventual self-determination, Tokelau was connected with the international phone system in 1994.

TIME

Tokelau is 11 hours behind GMT.

TOKELAU TELEPHONES *Errol Hunt*

While septic tanks are now common in Tokelau, some people still make use of the small huts perched above the lagoon. Such huts serve more than one purpose; they are a common meeting venue, and several men (or women) will gather in the one hut to swap gossip and discuss the busy day's events. This is why they're called 'Tokelau telephones'.

The Tokelau telephones have an obvious drawback. The atolls' lagoons are already under ecological pressure: garbage disposal directly into the lagoon is common (despite education programs encouraging composting and recycling), and the toilet huts add to this waste. Tokelau's telephones will eventually be phased out, their two functions replaced by sewerage tanks and modern telecommunications.

VISAS

The **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822, 71805; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia) in Samoa issues one-month visitor permits for NZ\$30. Accommodation needs to be arranged through TALO prior to arrival in Tokelau and a return ticket to Samoa must be booked. Also, consent must be given by the village *taupulega*.

TRANSPORT IN TOKELAU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting to Tokelau is not something you do on a whim – planning, waiting and keeping your fingers crossed all carry equal weight. And make sure you've got sea legs – there's no airstrip on Tokelau so the only way to get there is by boat or yacht.

Boat

Several ships service Tokelau, with one departure every 12 days or so (usually there are two or three sailings per month) from Apia in Samoa. The Tokelau Administration owns a cargo ship, the MV *Tokelau*, which makes the trip to Tokelau every two or three weeks. In addition, there are larger, dual-purpose passenger/cargo vessels that are hired to make the round trip every month or so. If you have a choice, and are keen on comfort (relatively speaking), go for a hired vessel – they have many more passenger bunks than the one-cabin MV *Tokelau*.

Bookings on these ships are made through the **Tokelau Apia Liaison Office** (TALO; ☎ 685-20822, 71805; zak-p@lesamoa.net; PO Box 865, Apia) in Samoa. Allow plenty of time to process your booking, and be aware that tourists are a lower priority than locals. Also remember that the sailing schedule published by TALO is not set in stone – actual departure dates can vary by more than a week from those originally announced.

The trip to Fakaofu (the closest atoll to Samoa) takes about 20 hours, and travellers have a choice between cabin fare (NZ\$530 return) and deck fare (NZ\$290). In either case there will be plenty of company on the voyage – you'll be travelling with a boatload of Tokelauans from Samoa and NZ returning home to see their families. The round trip from Apia to Tokelau and back takes about eight days.

There is no harbour on any of the atolls. The ship waits offshore while passengers and cargo are transferred via small boats and dinghies – a hair-raising experience if seas are heavy.

Yacht

Seek advice about the voyage to Tokelau from someone who has been there, and see p842 for more information about sailing in the Pacific.

Tokelau's atolls are low-lying and make difficult visual targets. There are no harbours and anchoring offshore is not easy, especially in an offshore wind. The sea floor drops off sharply outside the coral reef and the water is too deep for most anchor chains. There is one anchorage beyond the reefs at each atoll, but leave a crew member aboard in case the anchor doesn't hold. The channels blasted through the coral are shallow and are intended for dinghies only.

If you're heading to Tokelau on your own yacht, you will still need to apply for a visitor permit (see left).

GETTING AROUND

Inter-island travel is only possible on the ships that leave Apia for Tokelau (left). These ships usually visit all three atolls twice on each voyage. Sailing time is three hours between Fakaofu and Nukunonu, and five hours between Nukunonu and Atafu. Travel between the small islands on an atoll is usually done in a small aluminium dinghy, or by wading if the tide is low enough.

There are only a handful of vehicles in Tokelau.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'