

# Tonga

Tonga's outstanding natural beauty captivates its visitors – from the picture-postcard beachscapes you'd expect to find in the South Pacific, to the rainforests perched above soaring cliffs in 'Eua, to the protected waterways of sailing-Mecca Vava'u and the magnificent underwater world throughout its islands.

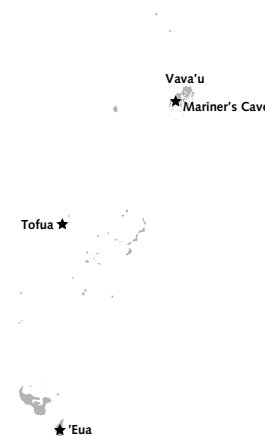
Travellers choose the pace of their adventure in Tonga, mixing slow-paced sun-and-sand holidays with unique and intrepid experiences. Humpback whales migrate to Tonga's warm waters to breed, and travellers circumnavigate the globe to dangle midwater with these mesmerising giants. A bit more planning could see you hiking up Hapa'ai's remote volcano, Tofua, to camp in its crater and stare into its bubbling caldera; kayaking on a multiday, multi-island adventure around Ha'apai or Vava'u; or sailing your charter yacht where the mood takes you around the Vava'u group.

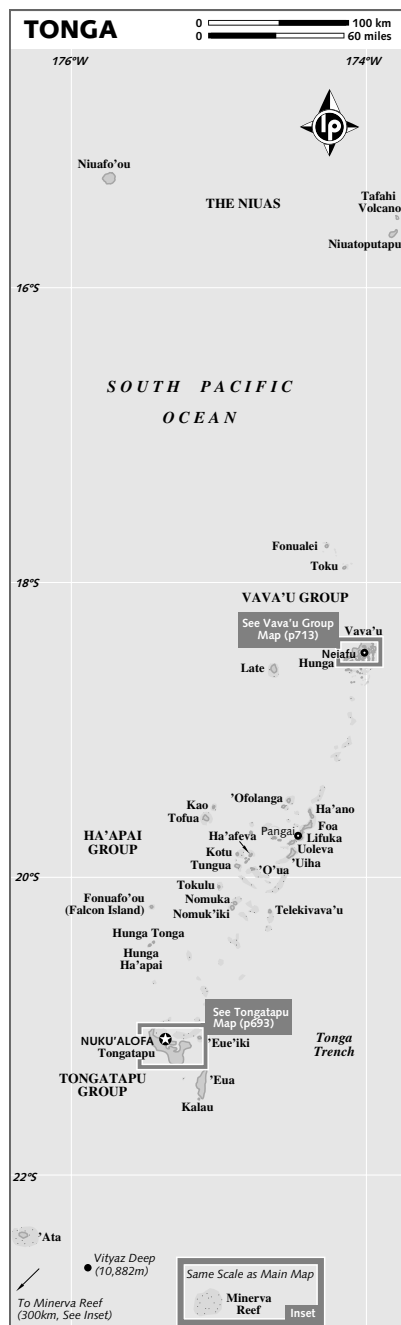
You won't find resorts selling packaged fun and you won't have to try to gain a cultural experience – it's all around. Wherever you are on a Sunday, you can be sure that powerful harmonies will be raising the roof at many local churches.

Despite its rich endowment, Tonga receives – and perhaps only wants – a relatively small number of visitors. For hundreds of years, Tonga has beguiled, charmed and frustrated travellers who have tried to get under the skin of this enigmatic kingdom. It defies sweeping description despite being one of the Pacific's most homogeneous societies. Although the modern world has made its mark, Tonga is still a very conservative country, and one wrestling uneasily with inevitable change.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Swim with the humpback **whales** (p718) that come to breed in Tonga's waters every year, or simply watch them in awe
- Hike through **'Eua's** (p705) virgin tropical rainforests to the edge of dramatic cliffs, delve into limestone caves and climb giant banyan trees
- Climb the eerie, uninhabited volcanic island of **Tofua** (p711) and peer into its glowing caldera
- Get the wind in your sails among the kingdom's beautiful islands, particularly around sailing-hub **Vava'u** (p715)
- Duck dive into **Mariner's Cave** (p722) – it's such an unnatural feeling to swim into the unknown – or snorkel in fish soup in **Vava'u** (p715)





## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate varies little across the kingdom. Vava'u and the Niuas are warmer and wetter than Tongatapu, and 'Eua is cooler. May to October is the best time to visit; the wet season is November to April. Cyclone season is from November to April, but most cyclones occur between January and March.

## HISTORY

One legend tells that the Tongan islands were fished out of the sea by the mighty Polynesian god Tangaloa. Another story has Tonga plucked from the ocean by the demigod Maui, a temperamental hero well known throughout the Pacific.

The date of the initial settlement of the Tongan group is around 1100 BC. It is believed that the Lapita people, who arrived in Tonga between 3300 and 3500 years ago, had their first capital at Toloa. Archaeological excavations in the village of Hihifo unearthed Lapita pottery which has carbonated settlement of this area to more than 3000 years ago. Islands of the Vava'u Group have been settled for around 2000 years.

The first king of Tonga, known as the Tu'i Tonga, was 'Aho'eitu. He came to power some time in the middle of the 10th century AD and was the first in a line of almost 40 men to hold the title.

During the 400 years after the first Tu'i Tonga, the Tongans were often aggressive colonisers, extending their empire over eastern Fiji, Niue and northward as far as the Samoas and Tokelau. Tongan warriors occasionally raided as far east as the Solomon Islands – 2700km away.

### TONGA FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu)
- **Population:** 101,000
- **Land area:** 718 sq km
- **Number of islands:** 171
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 676
- **Currency:** Tongan *pa'anga* (T\$)
- **Languages:** Tongan and English
- **Greeting:** *Malo e lelei*
- **Website:** [www.tongaholiday.com](http://www.tongaholiday.com)

## European Arrival

Among the first Europeans to visit Tonga were Jacob Lemaire, Abel Tasman and James Cook. Other European explorers to pass through the islands included Englishman Captain Samuel Wallis and Frenchmen Jean-François de Galaup, comte de la Pérouse and Antoine d'Entrecasteaux.

Tongatapu's first European visitor was Dutchman Abel Tasman, who spent a few days trading with islanders and named the island Amsterdam. The next European contact came with James Cook, who became close friends with the 30th Tu'i Tonga, Fatafehi Paulaho.

The first European to visit the Ha'apai group was Abel Tasman in 1643. James Cook and his men narrowly escaped attack in Ha'apai (see below), but the crew of British privateer *Port-au-Prince* were not so lucky in 1806. Survivor Will Mariner's account of his time in Tonga (see p708) is an enriching read.

## House of Tupou

In 1831, missionaries baptised the ruling Tu'i Tonga, who took the Christian name George, then took over the title of Tu'i Kanokupolu as well. As King George Tupou I, he united Tonga and with the help of the first prime minister, Reverend Shirley Baker, came up with a flag, a state seal and a national anthem, and then began drafting a constitution, passed in 1875. It included a bill of rights, a format for legislative and judicial procedures, laws for succession to the throne and a section on land tenure. It is also responsible for Tonga's heavily Christian laws today.

### COOK'S 'FRIENDLY ISLANDS'

On Captain James Cook's third voyage, he spent from April to July 1777 in the Tongan islands. At Nomuka, his first landfall, chief Finau of Ha'apai told him of a wealthier island, Lifuka, where supplies would be available.

While visiting Lifuka, Cook and his men were treated to lavish feasting and entertainment, inspiring Cook to name the Ha'apai Group 'the Friendly Islands'.

Thirty years later it was learned that the celebration had been part of a conspiracy to raid the two ships *Resolution* and *Discovery* for their plainly visible wealth. The entertainment had been planned in order to gather the Englishmen in one spot so that they could be quickly killed and their ships looted. There was, however, a dispute between Finau and his nobles over whether the attack would occur by day or under cover of night. Under Finau's direction it was agreed to take action during the afternoon; but the nobles failed to do so. Finau was so incensed at the defiance of his orders that the operation was abandoned. The Englishmen never learned how narrowly they had escaped.

The second king, George Tupou II, died at the age of 45 in 1918, and his 18-year-old daughter Salote became queen of Tonga. Queen Salote's primary concerns for her country were medicine and education. With intelligence and compassion, she made friends for Tonga throughout the world and was greatly loved by her subjects and foreigners alike.

Queen Salote's son, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, is the current ruler of Tonga. He has several notable accomplishments to his credit, including the re-establishment of full sovereignty for Tonga on 4 June 1970 and Tonga's admission to the Commonwealth of Nations and to the UN, although some of his economic decisions have been questionable.

## Recent History

Until recently, Tonga has been politically very stable (or static!). Although Tonga is a constitutional monarchy, the king, who appoints the prime minister (currently his son Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka 'Ata) and cabinet, has almost unlimited power. In 2005 Tonga's public servants went on strike to petition for wage increases for the first time in almost two decades. The strikers congregated in Nuku'alofa and as the weeks passed into months, support for them grew, along with the growing prodemocracy sentiment (and dissatisfaction with the ruling class). While most Tongans would never suggest abolishing the royal family, many would like to see an end to the nepotism, wasteful follies and corruption, and to have more of a say in the affairs of the country.

## THE CULTURE

Tonga is a largely homogenous, church- and family-oriented society. Although on the whole Tongans are open and extremely hospitable, due to cultural nuances, many foreigners feel a bit at arm's length. Gift giving is common.

Respectful dress is considered important in Tonga. Despite the increasing Western influence, modest dress – tops covering the chest and shoulders and skirts reaching below the knees (respectable sleeveless dresses are OK) – is expected in Tonga, though this code is a little more relaxed in Nuku'alofa and to a lesser extent Neiafu. Skimpy shorts (even on men) are considered to be inappropriate and swimsuits should only be worn in resorts or on very isolated beaches.

You'll often see Tongans wearing distinctive pandanus mats called *ta'ovala*. In place of a *ta'ovala*, women often wear a *kiekie*, a decorative waistband of woven strips of pandanus. Men frequently wear a wraparound skirt known as a *tupenu* and women an ankle-length *vala* (skirt) and *kofu* (tunic).

The concept of keeping 'face' is extremely strong in Tonga. Causing someone to lose face is a very serious social transgression, so if a Tongan makes an innocent mistake, do not start waving and shouting about it, or you are likely to cause them far greater anguish than they have caused you.

## Population

Tongans make up the vast majority of people in Tonga. There are a few *palangi* (Westerners) expats and a small but significant population of Chinese immigrants.

Tonga's total population is estimated to be around 101,000. Tongatapu has more than 65% of the total population, with around 30% in Nuku'alofa (the island's and the nation's capital).

Despite steady emigration (you'd be hard-pressed to find a Tongan who doesn't have relatives overseas), only Ha'apai and the Niuas suffer from falling populations. Estimates suggest there are as many Tongans living abroad as there are in the kingdom. Tonga is highly dependent on remittances sent by Tongans living overseas; however, support from overseas relatives is decreasing as the next generation of expat Tongans become more detached from their homeland.

## RELIGION

Tonga is, on the surface at least, a very religious country. The Free Wesleyan Church (the royal family's church of choice) claims the largest number of adherents, followed by the (Methodist) Free Church of Tonga, the Church of England, the Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and the wealthy and increasingly prominent Mormons.

Many Tongans still believe in the spirits, taboos, superstitions, medical charms and gods of pre-Christian Polynesia.

### FAKALEITI

One of the most distinctive features of Tongan culture are *fakaleiti* (men who dress and behave as women), a modern continuation of an ancient Polynesian tradition, known as *fa'afafine* in Samoa and *mahu* or *rae rae* in French Polynesia.

While most *fakaleiti* are probably gay, not all of them are. Many consider themselves ladies and wouldn't think of relating sexually to anyone but a masculine man; yet others are married to women. *Fakaleiti* get away with promiscuity with men on a scale forbidden to biological females, however. Seeing the *fakaleiti*'s open flaunting of sexuality and transvestitism, and their acceptance as part of Polynesian society, it might seem there is no social stigma attached to being a *fakaleiti*. However, although adult *fakaleiti* are accepted, growing up as a *fakaleiti* is not easy. Many are tormented by other children and teenagers and to most Polynesian fathers it's not a great source of pride if their sons turn out to be effeminate.

On Tongatapu, the Tonga Leitis' Association is an active group – note that members prefer to call themselves simply *leiti* (ladies). The association sponsors several popular, well-attended annual events, including the international Miss Galaxy competition in early July which attracts *fakaleiti* and transvestites from several countries. Similarly popular contests are held in Samoa and American Samoa from October onwards.

## ARTS

Tongans enjoy a fine reputation for their craftsmanship in woodcarving throughout the Pacific and many excellent examples can be bought in stores, markets or from the roadside. The Tongan gods Tangalao and Hikuleo are popular subjects. See p58 for more about Pacific carving.

The enormous Ha'amonga 'a Maui trilithon (p703) on Tongatapu is one of the most impressive carved stone structures in Polynesia.

## Dance

The most frequently performed traditional dance in Tonga is called the *lakalaka*. The *tau'olunga*, a female solo dance, is the most beautiful and graceful of all Tongan dances. The most popular male dance is the *kailao* – the war dance.

## Tapa

Tapa is Tonga's most renowned craft. Along with pandanus weavings, tapa is considered part of the *koloa* (wealth) of Tongan families. See p57 for further information.

## LANGUAGE

Tongan is a Polynesian language similar to Samoan. Because of the conquering exploits of ancient Tongans, similar languages are spoken on Wallis Island and Niue. In Nuku'alofa at least, almost everyone can speak English, though a few basic Tongan words are always appreciated.

### Tongan basics

Hello.	<i>Malo e lelei.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>'Alu a.</i>
How are you?	<i>Fefe hake?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Sai pe (malo).</i>
Please.	<i>Faka molemole.</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>Malo (aupito).</i>
Yes.	<i>'Io.</i>
No.	<i>Ikai.</i>

## ENVIRONMENT

The Kingdom of Tonga is made up of 171 islands, scattered across 700,000 sq km of ocean. Geographically Tonga is composed of four major island groups which are, from south to north: Tongatapu, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niuas. The kingdom is situated on the site where the Pacific tectonic

### BEST EATING

The Tongan diet consists mostly of root vegetables, coconut products, taro, fresh fruit, pork, chicken and fish, with little seasoning. Tonga's seafood is easy to come by and the delicious and light *ika lahi* (marinated raw fish) must be tried, at least once. Following are Lonely Planet's top Tongan dining experiences:

- Local foodies rave about top-notch Pearl Inn (p701).
- Try a Tongan Feast. Usually they're cooked in an *umu* (underground oven) and accompanied by traditional dance and song.
- Arrive by boat to dine and join the fun at well-loved La Paella (p720).
- Friends Café (p700) has great food, Royal Coffee and a breezy atmosphere (everyone tries it at least once).
- Pay a visit to Mariners Café (p710). After a week in Ha'apai, you'll never savour a pizza in quite the same way.

plate slides underneath the Indo-Australian plate, making Tonga a particularly volatile area renowned for volcanic and earthquake activity.

## Ecology

Tonga's national flower is the *heilala*. The most common plant you will see in Tonga is the coconut palm.

Dolphins and migrating humpback whales swim in the waters around Tonga. The humpbacks come from June to November and can often be seen offshore from the major islands.

The only land mammal native to Tonga is the flying fox (fruit bat).

Tonga has surprisingly few birds, but of interest are the *henga* (blue-crowned lorikeet); the *koki* (red shining parrot) of 'Eua; and the *malau* (megapode or incubator bird), found only on the island of Niuafu'ou, but also introduced in recent years to Late Island in Vava'u.

## National Parks

Tonga has eight officially protected areas, including five national marine parks and reserves, one national historic park (the

23-hectare Ha'amonga Trilithon Reserve), the 449-hectare 'Eua National Park and the Mt Talau National Park in Vava'u. There are plans to declare Tofua and Kao in Ha'apai as national parks. The whole of Ha'apai is a designated conservation area.

## TONGATAPU

pop 69,000 (est) / area 260 sq km

Tongatapu (Sacred South) Island is the landing and launching pad for most activity in Tonga. The majority of the island's population lives in Nuku'alofa (Abode of Love) and its adjoining villages.

Tongatapu faces the islands of Fafā and Pangaimotu, and is partially bordered by Fanga 'Uta Lagoon. Outside of Nuku'alofa, the island comprises of plots of agricultural land, small villages and plenty of churches.

Most archaeological sights – such as Lapaha and Ha'amonga 'a Maui Trilithon – are found on Tongatapu's eastern side, which also features caves, calm sandy coves, and the airport (in the southeast, see p694). To the

west is the wilder surf coast and the Mapu'a Vaca blowholes.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Friendly Islands Bookshop** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23787; Taufa'ahau Rd) The only bookshop of any consequence in Tonga, with a good selection of newspapers and magazines, paperbacks, travel titles and books about Tonga.

#### Internet Access

Nuku'alofa has many Internet cafés, including the following:

**DataLine Internet Cafe** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27773; Royco Bldg, Fatafehi Rd; per hr T\$2; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Sat) Blank DVDs/discs T\$5/1.30.

**Friends Tourist Centre** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26323; Taufa'ahau Rd; per 15min T\$2)

**Relax Café** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24444; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds; per 20 min/hr T\$1/2; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Fri, to late Sat) Blank CDs T\$1.50, CD burning T\$2.

#### Medical Services

**Friendly Island Medical Clinic & International**

**German Dental Clinic** (☎ 26797; Vuna Rd, Sopa; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3.30-8pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri) Make an appointment.

**Pharmacy** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22736, after office hr 27021; jacksis@kalianet.to; Wellington Rd; ☎ 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Consultations T\$20.

**Vaiola Hospital** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23200; Taufa'ahau Rd) Recommended only for emergencies.

**Village Mission Pharmacy** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27522; 'Unga Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat, medical clinic ☎ 2.30-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri) Central pharmacy, well-stocked with sunscreen, insect repellent, contact-lens solution, baby formula, gastrolyte, earplugs and the like. On-site medical clinic and Fa's Beauty Spa (waxings and beauty treatments).

#### Money

**ANZ** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24944; www.anz.com/tonga; cnr Salote & Railway Rds) There's an ATM inside bank.

**MBF** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24600; Taufa'ahau Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

**Western Union** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24345; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) GlobalEx money transfers. Shortest queues for currency exchange and open on Saturday morning.

**Westpac Bank of Tonga** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23933) Two branches have ATMs and open on Saturday morning.

#### Post

**Post office** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21700; cnr Taufa'ahau & Salote Rds) This office has a poste restante window next to the main entrance; address to: Post Restante, GPO,

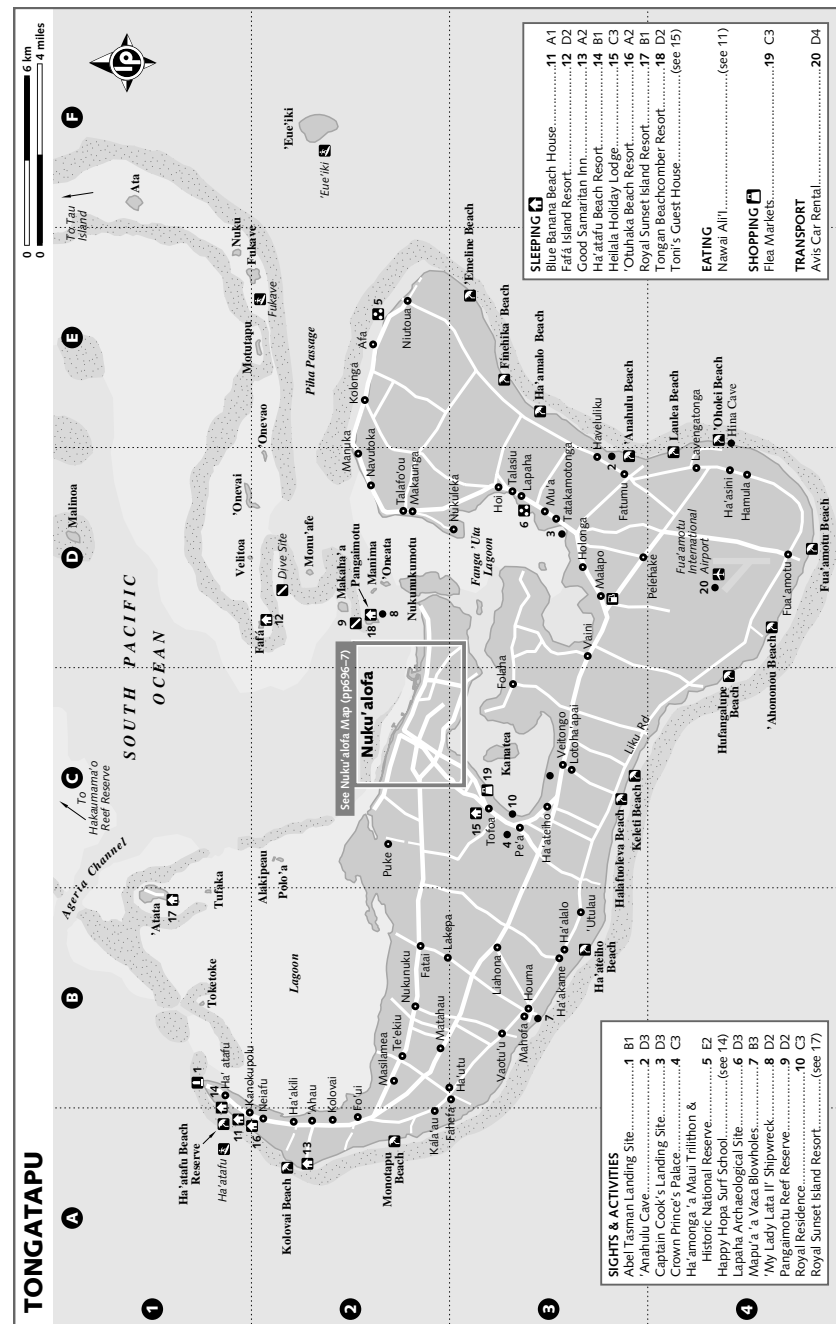
### TONGATAPU IN...

#### Two Days

Spend day one finding your bearings on a circumnavigational island tour (p698), exploring archaeological marvels, caves and seaside cemeteries, witnessing the blowholes in action and getting acquainted with Tongatapu's western beaches. Alight in Nuku'alofa to soak up the sunset tones over the waterfront and dine on the best seafood around at the **Pearl Inn** (p701). On day two, join the bustle and explore the wares at **Talamahu Market** (p695), before perusing the capital's sights and getting acquainted with traditional culture at the **Tongan National Centre** (p695).

#### Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary then catch a ferry to 'Eua (p705) to hike in its dramatic landscape and soak up impressive ocean views, particularly during whale season. Or, head for Tongatapu's outer islands (p704) for beachside frolics and navel gazing. Join a **culture show** (p702) and do what the Tongans do so well – feast!



Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga. Ask specifically for any larger parcels. International post cleared 2pm Monday and Friday.

## Tourist Information

**Friends tourist centre** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26232; friends@tonfon.to; Taufa'ahau Rd) A switched-on tour-booking office with plenty of details on what's happening around the island.

**Tonga visitors bureau** (TVB; Map pp696-7; ☎ 25334; www.tongaholiday.com; Vuna Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat & holidays) There are lists of church services and 'island nights' posted on a board outside.

## Travel Agencies

The following agencies make bookings for local tours in addition to selling international flights:

**Jetsave** (☎ 23052; www.taufonua.com; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) Books day tours, and domestic package holidays to all island groups.

**Jones Travel & Tours** (☎ 23422/3; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds)

**Teta Tours** (☎ 23690; fax 23238; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds)

## TRANSPORT

### Getting There & Away

See p729 for information on transport between Tongatapu and other countries.

### AIR

Fua'amotu International Airport is near Fua'amotu, a 30-minute drive from Nuku'alofa. **Airline Tonga Air Fiji** (www.airlinestonga.com) services 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niuaus from the domestic terminal. **Peau Vava'u** (☎ 28326; Pacific Royal Hotel, Taufa'ahau Rd) services Ha'apai and Vava'u. Domestic services fly out of the domestic terminal, nearby the International Airport. Transfers between the terminals cost T\$2.

Offices in Nuku'alofa of airlines connecting Tongatapu with other Pacific destinations include the following:

**Air Fiji** (☎ 23690; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds) Contact Teta Tours.

**Air New Zealand** (☎ 23192; www.airnz.co.nz; Tongi Arcade, Taufa'ahau Rd)

**Air Pacific** (☎ 23422/3; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds) Contact Jones Travel & Tours.

**Pacific Blue** (www.virginblue.com.au)

**Polynesian Airlines** (☎ 24566; www.polynesianairlines.com; cnr Salote & Fatafehi Rds)

### BOAT

The MV *'Olovaha*, and the MV *Pulupaki* connect Tongatapu with Ha'apai and Vava'u; the former also services the Niuaus. Other vessels provide frequent services between Tongatapu and 'Eua. See p731 for details of schedules and fares.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis meet all incoming flights, charging T\$20 to T\$25 between the airport and Nuku'alofa. Many hotels and guesthouses arrange transfers from the airport, or there's a Teta Tours bus (see p698) that does the trip for T\$12. **Toni's Tours** (☎ 21049; tonigh@kalianet.to) are the cheapest, charging T\$6/10 from/to the airport.

### BICYCLE

Some guesthouses have bicycles for guest use.

**Niko's Bicycle Rental** (Map pp696-7; Waterfront, Vuna Rd; half-/full-day bicycle hire T\$5/8; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) is run from a trailer opposite the International Dateline Hotel. Test out a few.

### BOAT

The offshore island resorts all provide boat transport. Boat trips near and far can be arranged with **Sea-Taxi** (☎ 22795, 15723; http://kalianet.to/seataxi).

### BUS

Nuku'alofa's two bus terminals are on Vuna Rd. Buses to outlying areas of Tongatapu depart from the western terminal (close to Vuna Wharf; Map pp696-7), while Nuku'alofa buses leave from the eastern terminal (opposite the TVB; Map pp696-7). Fares range from 50 *seniti* to T\$1. The bus service starts around 6am, with the last departing about 4.30pm; there's no Sunday service.

In urban areas, bus stops are marked with a small sign reading 'Pasi'. Elsewhere, flag down a bus by waving. Passengers normally pay as they get off.

### CAR & MINIBUS

Car- and minibus-hire companies offer unlimited kilometres included in their rates and some offer special rates for weekends or long-term rental. Contact Fab and Sunshine by telephone, as they will deliver rental cars to you. Companies include the following:

**Aviss** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21179, airport 35324; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) From T\$80 per day.

**Fab Rentals** (☎ 23077; fabsigns@kalianet.to; Salote Rd, Maufanga) Cars and vans for T\$50 to T\$60 per day, including insurance and door-to-door service.

**Sunshine Rental Cars** (☎ /fax 23848; srental@yahoo.co.nz; Lopaukamea, Nuku'alofa) Cars from T\$50 per day.

You must get a Tongan driving licence from the police before heading out.

### TAXI

Within Nuku'alofa, taxis charge a standard T\$3 fare, or T\$5 to T\$6 to the outskirts of town. Taxis have a 'T' on the licence plate and are not permitted to operate on Sunday, but some guesthouses know secret Sunday taxi suppliers. Taxi companies include the following:

**Aloha Fuaa Taxi** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22505) On the waterfront near the wharf.

**Talamahu Market Taxi** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22713; cnr Salote & Railway Rds)

## NUKU'ALOFA

pop 23,000

While it may not fulfil a vision of Pacific paradise, Tonga's 'big smoke', Nuku'alofa, still has a little charm and a little promise when you blow the dust from its surface. Its broad waterfront strip provides magnificent views across the bay to beautiful coral islands (just a boat ride away), there's a bustling market, enviable quality dining options for a place its size, and you'll still find the occasional chicken roaming in the main street. Nuku'alofa is the kingdom's seat of government and home of the royal family.

### Royal Palace

Surrounded by large lawns and Norfolk pines, the white Victorian-style Royal Palace (Map pp696-7), with its red corrugated roof, is a symbol of Tonga to the rest of the world. The palace grounds are not open to visitors but you can get a good view from the waterfront area on the west side.

### Royal Tombs

The Mala'ekula (Map pp696-7), the large parklike area opposite the basilica, has been the resting place of the royals since 1893. It's off limits to the public but you can peer through the crested perimeter fence.

## Churches

Royal watchers/rubbernecker (regardless of denomination) head to the 1952 **Centenary Chapel** (Map pp696-7; Wellington Rd) to catch a glimpse of members of the royal family at a Sunday service and to hear the magnificent, booming singing of the congregation. Dress well.

Nuku'alofa's most distinctive structure is the circus tent-like **Basilica of St Anthony of Padua** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd), opposite the Royal Tombs. It has a beautiful interior of stained glass, wooden beams and hand-crafted furnishings.

**St Mary's Cathedral** (Map pp696-7; Vuna Rd), near Fuaa jetty, is worth visiting for its beautiful rose gardens, stained glass and vaulted ceiling.

## Talamahu Market

One of Nuku'alofa's most interesting sights is **Talamahu** (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd; ☎ early morning-4.30pm), which is also the kingdom's main fresh-produce hub. Downstairs you'll find root-crop heavy produce in hand-made woven frond baskets, branches of bananas, colourful pyramids of weighed-out produce and a few food stands. Excellent Tongan arts and crafts are found on both floors.

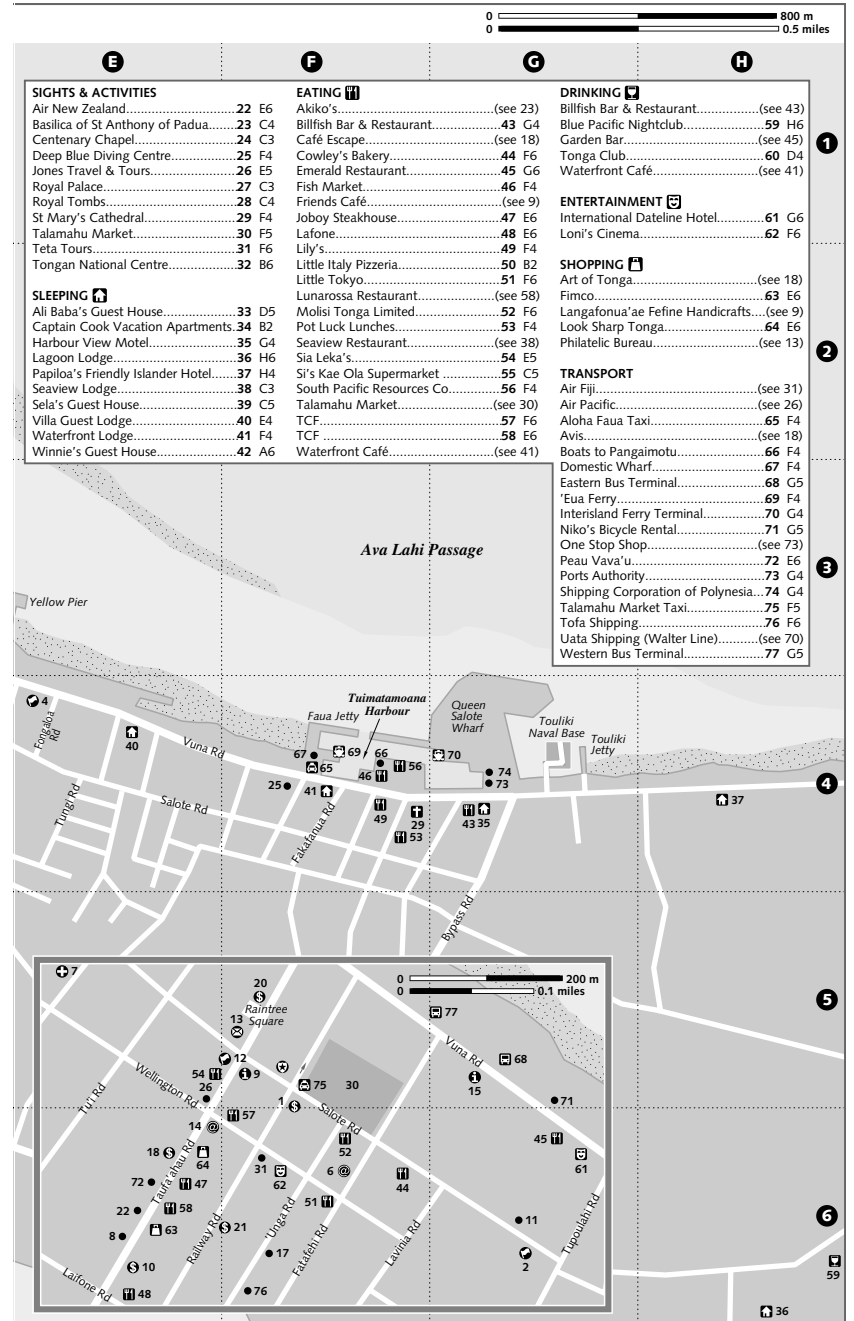
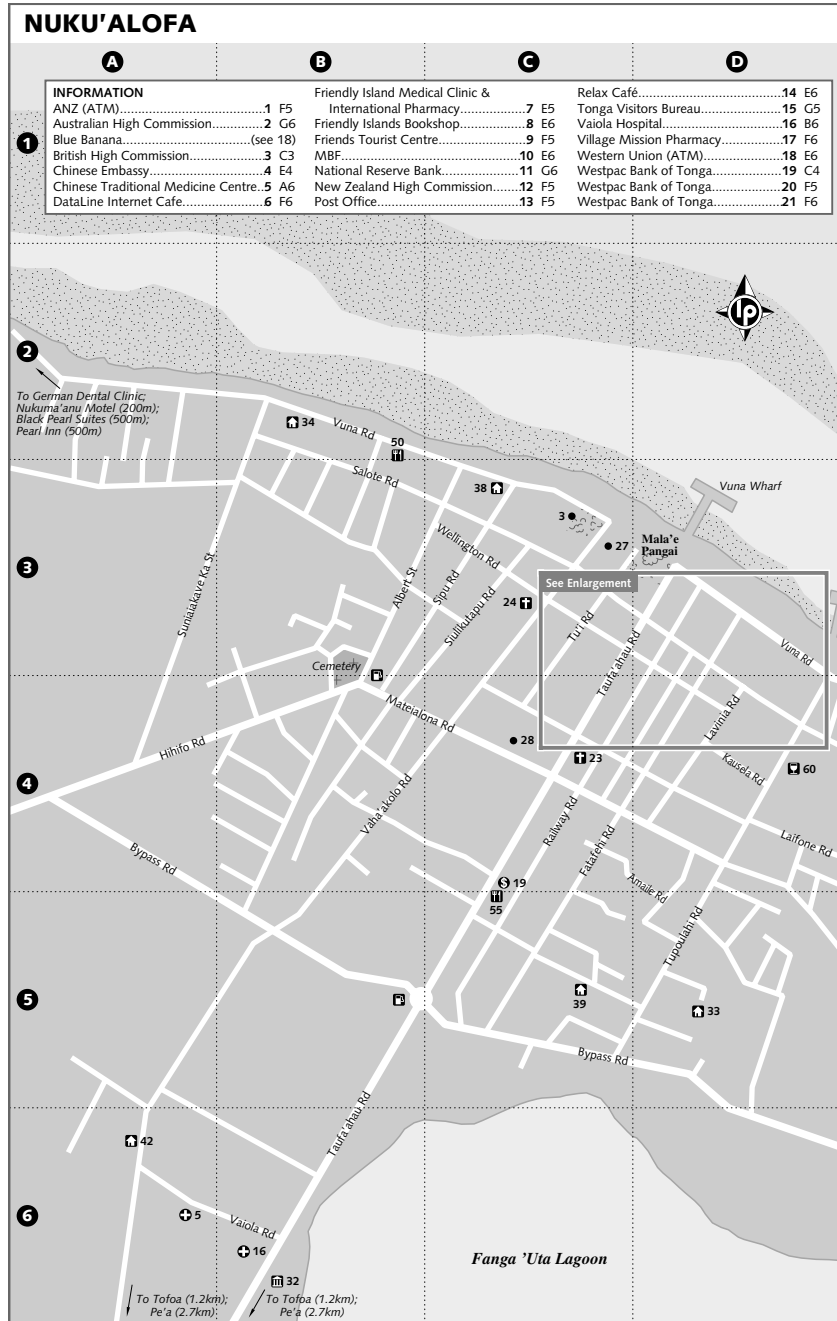
## Tongan National Centre

It would be a major feat to spend any time in Tonga without having some sort of cultural experience, but a visit to the **Tongan National Centre** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23022; Taufa'ahau Rd, Vaiola; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a good spot to start. The museum contains historical artefacts and cultural items still in use today.

Good-value **cultural tours** (adult/child T\$15/8; ☎ tours 2pm Mon-Fri) include demonstrations of tapa making, weaving and basketry, traditional dancing and carving.

The **dinner show** (adult/child T\$25/13, show only T\$5; ☎ 7.30pm Tue & Thu) starts with a kava ceremony, features traditional dishes cooked in an *umu*, and has one of Tonga's best traditional dance and music shows.

A ride in a local bus offers an experience of Nuku'alofa's contemporary culture, so take the Vaiola bus to the centre from the eastern terminal on Vuna Rd (50 *seniti*). Taxis cost about T\$4, and a shuttle bus (T\$1) is available for the dinner show.



## Activities

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

Around the Tongatapu Group subaquatic adventures range from snorkelling around the wreck off Pangaimotu and the excellent Makaha'a Reef to diving 'Eua's unique sea caves.

**Deep Blue Diving Centre** (Map pp696-7; ☎/fax 23379; www.deep-blue-diving.to; Vuna Rd) offers two dives (T\$85, including lunch and all gear) and five-/10-day dive packages (from US\$400/750). The major diving drawcards around Tongatapu are 'Eua's enormous sea caves and the beautiful uninhabited islands north of Tongatapu. Extended boat-based dive charters and accommodation packages are available.

**Royal Sunset Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎/fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to) on 'Atata is close to a host of dive sites. One-/two-tank dives cost T\$77/127. Full gear hire can mount to T\$69/110.

### FISHING

Fish Aggregating Devices (similar to large buoys or floats that are put in the seriously deep water to attract smaller organisms and the big game that feed on them), located around the island, attract big game.

**Precision Charters** (☎ 24700; skipcust@kalianet.to) takes fisherfolk out to the big game for T\$600/1000 per half-/full day including lunch (maximum of four people).

**Royal Sunset Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎/fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to) offers half-/full-day game fishing for T\$550/850 (maximum four anglers).

**Sea-Taxi** (☎ 22797; sugar@kalianet.to) offers full-day game fishing for T\$1200.

### SURFING

Tongatapu's northwest coast, off Ha'atafu Beach, is renowned for its surf. There's also a series of interesting-looking reef-breaks between Fukave and 'Onevao. The **Happy Hopa Surf School** (Map p693; ☎ 41088; www.surfingtonga.com, Ha'atafu Beach Resort, Ha'atafu) runs one-on-one surfing lessons (A\$25 per hour) for beginners and reef novices.

### WHALE WATCHING

Many game fishing boats, as well as the Deep Blue Diving Centre, run whale-watching charters between June and November. You could also take a ferry across to 'Eua for this

purpose. See p707 for details on catching the ferry.

### Tours

Tongatapu's main sights can be comfortably covered in a day tour of the island. Most tour operators require a minimum of four people.

**Friendly Island Experience** (☎ 29910; www.tongaexperience.com) Tongatapu island tours (T\$45, six to seven hours). Tours include fresh fruit. German and English are spoken. Arrange a meeting point when you call.

**Jones Travel & Tours** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23422; jonestr@kalianet.to; cnr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds) Half-/whole-island tours are T\$63/70.

**Teta Tours** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23690; tetatour@kalianet.to; cnr Wellington & Railway Rds) Half-/whole-island tours are T\$55/70.

**Toni's Tours** (☎ 21049, 27068; tonigh@kalianet.to) Tongatapu's most popular full-day whole-island tours (T\$30) run daily (minimum three people). Take swimming gear, a torch (flashlight), drinks and lunch or organise to eat at Good Samaritan Inn. Other trips negotiable. Arrange a meeting point when you call.

### Sleeping

Houses and flats for rent are listed at the TVB and on the bulletin boards at Friend's Tourist Centre and Molisi Tonga Limited supermarket (p702). Prices start around T\$400/500 per month for a furnished apartment/house; elegance will set you back upwards of T\$850 per month. Self-contained apartments in Nuku'alofa:

**Captain Cook Vacation Apartments** (Map pp696-7; ☎/fax 25600; info@captaincook.to; Vuna Rd; d apt T\$144, over 5 nights T\$133, extra person T\$29; 🍷) Two-bedroom apartments on the waterfront. Two children under 12 stay free of charge.

**Lagoon Lodge** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26515; lagoons.lodge@kalianet.to; 'Umusi; 1-bed apt from T\$170, 2-bed apt from T\$195) Bright, lagoonside apartments with ISD telephones. You'll need to take a taxi or hire a car.

**Marketonga** (☎ 75623; www.marketonga.to) Deals in furnished rental properties.

### BUDGET

#### Guesthouses & Motels

Midrange options, including groovy Ali Baba's Guest House, Heilala Holiday Lodge and Papilola's Friendly Islander Hotel, also offer excellent budget rooms.

**Toni's Guest House** (Map p693; ☎/fax 21049, ☎ 27068; tonigh2@yahoo.co.uk; Tofua; r per person T\$10.75) Toni's is the ultrabudget favourite.

### WHALING POLITICS *Miranda Tetlow*

Tongans have hunted whales for centuries, consuming whale meat and using whale bone in numerous traditional instruments and artefacts. Up until a royal decree in 1979, around 10 humpback whales were caught every year. Today, however, much of Tonga's tourist industry depends on the protected and migrating humpback whales. Although Tonga is not a member country of the IWC (International Whaling Commission), delegates have voiced their concern at Japan's attempts to reintroduce and increase commercial and scientific whaling. By a narrow margin at the IWC in June 2005, Japan and other countries' bid to have the existing moratorium lifted was defeated.

*In 2003 Miranda Tetlow spent 12 months in Nuku'alofa, where she worked as a media advisor for a Tongan NGO. She has been passionate about Tonga and its people ever since.*

It's renowned for regular all-inclusive kava sessions and the island's most popular tours (both are peppered with the owner's dry English humour) as much as for its vivid green walls. It's a basic place with a small, communal lounge and kitchen. The owners offer a shuttle service to/from town (which may incur a small fee); transfers to/from the airport cost T\$10/6.

**Sela's Guest House** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25040; met.tonga@kalianet.to; off Fatafehi Rd; dm T\$15, s/d T\$50/60) Stablelike rooms open off a central courtyard and guests have use of the kitchen. There are also rooms that share a bathroom (s/d/tr T\$20/30/40). Lavish cooked breakfasts with fruit are available (T\$8). It's a 15-minute walk from town.

**Winnie's Guest House** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25215; winnies@kalianet.to; Vaha'akolo Rd; beds per person incl breakfast T\$40; 📺) This homely five-room house about 2km from town has a well-equipped kitchen, and a lounge with board games and plenty of DVDs. Lunch is available for T\$10, dinner for T\$15. It's popular with international medical students, so book in advance.

### Camping

Camping is possible at the Good Samaritan Inn (p704) on Ha'atafu Beach and on Pangaimotu (p704), offshore from Nuku'alofa.

### MIDRANGE

**Heilala Holiday Lodge** (Map p693; ☎ 29910; www.heilala-holiday-lodge.com; Tofua; s/d T\$40/60, s/d Tongan fale T\$60/80, extra bed T\$25; 🍷) Cute, thatched fale (houses) are spaced through tropical gardens with a shaded swimming pool in this unlikely suburban location, 3km south of Nuku'alofa. Rates include a toast and tropical trims breakfast, and kitchen facilities are

available; air-conditioning costs an extra T\$25. One-night stays cost 50% extra. Meals are served for mains T\$16.50 to T\$28. The owners can organise beach trips, island tours and car hire. Catch buses to Nuku'alofa (50 *seniti*, every few minutes) from Taufa'ahau Rd, a five-minute walk away.

**Nukuma'anu Motel** (☎ 22186; fax 24217; fml@tonfon.to; Vuna Rd, Sopu; d T\$104; 🍷) Readers' have found these detached, airy Tongan fale, opposite the waterfront, the perfect retreat. Each is self-contained and has plenty of comforts. Some of the capital's best restaurants are nearby and it's a short drive or good stroll from the post office.

**Harbour View Motel** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25488; harb.vmtl@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; s/d T\$58/81, deluxe s/d/f T\$87/110/156, spa ste d/f T\$196/207; 🍷) Handy to Queen Salote Wharf, the Billfish and surrounding bars, this motel has comfortable beds and some of the best-pressure showers in Tonga. Tidy rooms have fans, telephones and tea/coffee facilities, while deluxe rooms also offer air-conditioning, a fridge and TV/video. The continental breakfast spread (T\$8) is ample.

**Papilola's Friendly Islander Hotel** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23810; papilola@tongatapu.to; Vuna Rd; dm T\$20, d unit/fale with bathroom T\$60/95, d self-contained bungalow T\$110; 🍷 📺) Like an uncle that found his look a couple of decades back – and stuck with it – this place is showing its age. The multipastel-coloured fale, with chintzy bed covers, are pleasantly spread throughout tropical gardens and the lounge/bar is verging on the retro. Budget accommodation is in the drab units and comes without private bathrooms. A good spot for families, there's kids' play equipment (over concrete) next to the swimming pool. Continental cooked breakfast is T\$7.50/12.

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Ali Baba's Guest House** (Map pp696-7; ☎ /fax 25154; www.alibabaguesthouse.com; off Tupulahi Rd, Ngele'ia; s/d incl breakfast T\$40/60, d & f incl breakfast from T\$80, extra person T\$10; 🍷) Funky floors in chequered gold with blue or green flow through each room, which have their own colour schemes and themes. The facilities are ultraclean and a festive, and the friendly ambience breezes through the communal lounge to the pretty gardens. Meals here are plentiful (dinner T\$15) and get rave reviews from guests. It's about 15 minutes' walk from the post office.

**TOP END**

Establishments in this category have cable/satellite TV, private telephones and some of Nuku'alofa's best restaurants attached to them. While all of these options are on the waterfront, there is no real beach here.

**Villa Guest Lodge** (Map pp696-7; ☎ /fax 24998; www.tongavilla.com; Vuna Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast T\$125/145/180; 🍷) An elegant and breezy, unfussed colonial style flows through this attractive lodge that is centrally located and close to good restaurants. The five double rooms have compact bathrooms. There's a huge lounge and a broad balcony facing the waterfront – just perfect for dipping into a novel or two.

**Seaview Lodge** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23709; seaview@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; standard/garden/seaview d T\$145/175/185; 🍷) This reliable favourite for regulars has large balconied rooms (with great showers) decorated with local crafts. The lodge sits in immaculate gardens behind rave-worthy Seaview Restaurant, a few minutes' walk west of the post office.

**Waterfront Lodge** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25260; waterfro@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd; garden/seaview d incl breakfast T\$175/185, extra bed T\$41; 🍷) The Waterfront's boutique-style elegance colours its eight spacious rooms, which are furnished in teak and cane, with Gauguin prints and marine-blue bed covers. French doors open onto the broad balcony, complete with deck chairs; and there are harbour views from 'seaview' rooms. (Children under 12 are not catered for.) Also the Waterfront Café (opposite) is located here.

**Black Pearl Suites** (☎ 28393; thepearl@kalianet.to; Vuna Rd, Sopus; d ste T\$180, executive ste T\$345; 🍷)

Friendly staff have their finger on the 'guest comfort' pulse at this luxurious, waterfront spot on the outskirts of town. The ski chalet-like interior and four-poster or sleigh beds with Versace-style covers in burgundy and emerald are a South Pacific anomaly. Each room has a balcony, while executive suites have azure-tiled spa baths and fully equipped kitchens. Baby-sitting can be arranged. Its restaurant (Pearl Inn; see opposite) serves the best food in Nuku'alofa.

**Eating**

Nuku'alofa's decent spread of cafés and restaurants are mostly stretched along the waterfront Vuna Rd and on, or nearby, Taufa'ahau Rd.

Tongan cuisine can be sampled at island-style buffets and feasts (see p702).

**CAFÉS**

**Friends Café** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22390; Taufa'ahau Rd; breakfast T\$4.50-13, mains T\$9.50-20; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, breakfast & lunch Sat) With a breezy charm and dependably good food, Friends, at the centre of town, is deservedly popular. The daily menu may feature seafood chowder, lamb shanks in herbed tomato over sweet potato mash, the ever popular stacked burgers or chunks of battered local fish. Sample the local roast, Royal Coffee.

**Café Escape** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21212; Taufa'ahau Rd; breakfast T\$3.50-16, mains T\$8-16; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Slick little Café Escape could be anywhere but provides a refined, air-con oasis and infuses the tropics into its mixed menu. Choose from all-day breakfasts, panini and pies, Asian-style main dishes and sweet-tooth tempters. Great coffee.

**Akiko's** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25339; Taufa'ahau Rd; snacks & meals T\$1.80-6.60; 🍷) lunch Mon-Fri) Duck under the basilica for excellent-value Chinese and curry dishes, mixed Tongan plates and *'ota ika* (a Tongan raw-fish dish). Excellent smoothies.

**QUICK EATS**

Noodle and fried-rice dishes at Nuku'alofa's Chinese restaurants (many opening Sunday!) make good money-conscious meals (around T\$5).

**Lily's** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24226; Vuna Rd; mains T\$6.50-15.50; 🍷) 10am-2pm Mon-Sat, 6-10pm daily) Opposite the wharf, Lily's has clean food on its 101-item menu.

**Emerald Restaurant** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24619; Vuna Rd; mains T\$5-18; 🍷) lunch & dinner) Locals (including the adventurous airline pilots) assure us the generous dishes here are reliably good.

Eating *bain-marie* chicken dishes in a tropical climate could verge on an extreme sport, but if you're game you can pick up a local chicken or *sipi* (mutton flap) curry at **Sia Leka's** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd; dishes T\$4-6; 🍷) lunch & dinner) or **Lafone** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24744; Laifone Rd; curry T\$3.50; 🍷) 24hr Mon-Sat), opposite the basilica.

**RESTAURANTS**

**Pot Luck Lunches** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25091; off Salote Rd; lunch T\$4-6; 🍷) lunch Mon-Fri & dinner 2nd Mon of month during school terms) Take 'pot luck' on the one set meal prepared in this training restaurant behind St Mary's Cathedral. Bring your own alcohol.

**Billfish Bar & Restaurant** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24084; Vuna Rd; lunch & dinner T\$10-32; 🍷) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This is the closest you'll get to pub-style meals – and they're great. Choose from burgers, mountainous chicken stir-fry, Thai fish curry, ultrafresh fish and chips, NZ steaks and garlic prawns. There's often live music; see p702.

**Joboy Steakhouse** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27920; Taufa'ahau Rd; mains T\$10-30; 🍷) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Popular with locals and visitors alike for solid meals and every international rugby game on the big screen. Feast on seafood, top your prime (NZ) beef with a choice of sauces or tuck into an all-homemade Joboy burger. Ikae flows on tap.

**Little Tokyo** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22474; Wellington Rd; mains T\$7-17; 🍷) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Wash down your made-to-order sushi, sashimi or *don* (meat/fish on rice) dishes with sake at this consistently good Japanese *iza-kaya* (drinking restaurant).

**Little Italy Pizzeria** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25053; Vuna Rd; pizza & pasta T\$14-20; 🍷) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The alps meet the Pacific in this Tonganified trattoria where hit-and-miss pizzas can verge on the experimental with occasional oddities such as baked beans. Fish and steak dishes and homemade Italian desserts plump up the menu. The garden play equipment makes it a good family spot. Takeaway available.

**Lunarossa Restaurant** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26324; Taufa'ahau Rd; mains T\$18-36; 🍷) dinner Mon-Sat; 🍷) Sophisticates enjoy intimate fine dining on

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Pearl Inn** (☎ 28393; Vuna Rd, Sopus; entrée salads T\$16-21, mains T\$25-40, desserts T\$10-12; 🍷) dinner Mon-Sun; 🍷) This is where the foodies head for a fine-dining splurge (suggested as 'five star by NZ standards' by an avid fan). Prime rib, scotch and eye fillet steaks – sourced from Australia and NZ, along with the wines – are smothered in blue cheese or avocado sauce, while the best seafood in Tonga includes huge lobster grilled with mornay, avocado or whiskey sauce. Sunday's Prime Rib Roast night is a regular favourite (bookings essential).

authentic Italian cuisine, with the added bonus of ultrafresh and well-prepared seafood. The food is complemented by excellent service and good wines.

**Seaview Restaurant** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23709; Vuna Rd; starters T\$12-23, mains T\$31-43; 🍷) dinner) Seaview has long been on the lips of seafood-loving locals and expats. Order your lobster natural, 'Seaview', Thermidor, Provençale, Polynesian or saffron, or try noncrustaceans such as red snapper and fillet steak. Bookings recommended.

**Waterfront Café** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21004; Vuna Rd; breakfast T\$11-18, snacks T\$16, mains T\$20-40; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Soak up the stylishly breezy mood and follow sundowners with reasonable meals of pasta (with truffle sauce), fish parcels, scotch-fillet steak, lobster and seafood.

**SELF-CATERING**

**Talamahu Market** (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd; 🍷) early morning-4.30pm) Fruit and vegetables are sold by the pyramid (around T\$2 to T\$3) or woven frond basket (for root crops and coconuts) with prices generally marked.

**Cowley's Bakery** (The Bread Bin; Map pp696-7; ☎ 26019; Salote Rd; baked goods 30 seniti-T\$2; 🍷) 6am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) The Sunday afternoon social mecca does a brisk trade in baked goods including meat pies, pull-apart savoury breads, muffins, doughnuts and lurid pineapple-iced cupcakes.

Nuku'alofa has a number of supermarkets, including the competitively-priced branches of the **Tonga Cooperative Federation** (TCF; Map pp696-7; cnr Wellington & Taufa'ahau Rds; Taufa'ahau Rd) and the well-stocked **Molisi**



**Tonga Limited** (Map pp696-7; Salote Rd), opposite Talamahu Market, which sells wine. **Sif's Kae Ola Supermarket** (Map pp696-7; Taufa'ahau Rd) is by far the best stocked.

The fish market on Tuimatamoana Harbour starts when boats come in around 5am Monday to Saturday. **South Pacific Resources Co** (☎ 26296; Tuimatamoana Harbour; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), nearby, sells local fish and big game.

## Drinking

Tongans drink with enthusiasm and Nuku'alofa has a spirited bar scene, ranging from upmarket to unashamedly seedy. Friday is the big night, as everywhere closes at midnight on Saturday.

Inquire locally about recommended kava circles (which you may be invited to join). Ordinarily a male-only affair, both men and women are welcome around the kava bowl at Toni's Guest House (p698).

A few popular venues line the waterfront on Vuna Rd.

**Billfish Bar & Restaurant** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24084; Vuna Rd; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Thu, 9am-4am Fri, 5pm-11.59pm Sat) Easily the most popular bar in town, this relaxed open-air place (with decent food) regularly has live music.

**Waterfront Café** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21004; Vuna Rd) Sip on sundowner champagne cocktails, margaritas and daiquiris, or a cool beer and sink into the rattan, Raffles-esque chairs at this Colonial-style bar/restaurant.

**Blue Pacific Nightclub** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 25994; admission Fri/Sat T\$6/3; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue-Fri, to midnight Sat) When the bars call for last drinks, night owls and those that 'just want to dance' (hip-hop, rap and reggae) head 3km southeast of central Nuku'alofa to Tonga's only real nightclub. It's quite likely someone else will commandeer your drink and that women – even those accompanied by husbands or male friends – will feel put upon to dance with local men.

For a cheap beer, head to **Tonga Club** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22710; Tupoulahi Rd), a dingy, historic pub, and the free-spirited **Garden Bar** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22101; Vuna Rd), behind the Emerald Restaurant.

## Entertainment

### ISLAND BUFFETS & TRADITIONAL DANCE

The best dance and buffet evenings (T\$25, half price for children) are held at the Tongan National Centre (p695) and beachside

Good Samaritan Inn (p704; T\$30 with Nuku'alofa transfer; 7.30pm Friday), on the western side of Tongatapu, which also has a Sunday barbecue with live music. At **International Dateline Hotel** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23411; Vuna Rd; ☎ 7.30pm Wed), you could show up around 8.30pm to watch the show for the price of a drink at the bar.

## CINEMAS

**Loni's Cinema** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23617; Wellington Rd; admission T\$5; ☎ Thu-Sat, midnight screening Sun) Nuku'alofa's only cinema is a very basic affair screening recent Hollywood staples.

## Shopping

### ARTS & CRAFTS

Tongan arts, crafts and carvings are sold on both floors of the Talamahu Market (p695) and in various shops along Taufa'ahau Rd.

**Art of Tonga** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 27667; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) Master carvings in wood, bone and shell make up the centrepiece of this small shop which has a refined collection of quality, well-displayed Tongan arts and crafts (making it easier to picture how souvenirs will look back home!).

Other good places to try include the following:

**Langafonua'ae Fefine Handicrafts** (Map pp696-7;

☎ 21014; Taufa'ahau Rd)

**Friendly Islands Marketing Co-operative** (Fimco;

☎ 23155; Taufa'ahau Rd)

## CLOTHING

**Flea markets** (Map p693; Taufa'ahau & Vuna Rds; ☎ Sat morning) Join the locals and rifle through the stalls to find some old weavings and mats, and a change to the traveller's wardrobe: second-hand clothes, presoftened Hawaiian shirts.

The best shops for resort-style T-shirts:

**Blue Banana** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 22662; Fund Management Bldg, Taufa'ahau Rd) With T-shirt logos such as 'Kava-Cola' and handmade sarongs.

**Look Sharp Tonga** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 26056; Taufa'ahau Rd) Features plenty of hibiscus, tapa designs and a signature kava-dyed range.

## STAMPS

**Philatelic Bureau** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 21700; post office, cnr Taufa'ahau & Salote Rds) Tonga's colourful stamps are interesting just to look at (marking various moments in history) and make good souvenirs.

## AROUND THE ISLAND

Tongatapu features beaches, caves, blowholes and coral reefs, as well as some of the most extensive excavated archaeological sites in the Pacific.

## Eastern Tongatapu

East of Nuku'alofa, between Tofoa and Pe'a, you'll pass the **royal residence** (Map p693) of the Princess, adorned with white tigers and cannons pointed towards the Crown Prince's austere European-style hill-top palace, opposite.

A cairn above a mangrove inlet near Holonga village marks **Captain Cook's landing site** (Map p693).

## MU'A (LAPAHA)

The Mu'a area contains the richest concentration of archaeological remnants in Tonga. In AD 1200 the 11th Tu'i Tonga, Tu'itatui, moved the royal capital from Heketa (near present-day Niutoua) to Lapaha (Map p693), now known as Mu'a. There are 28 royal stone tombs (*langi*) in the area (15 of which are monumental), built with enormous limestone slabs carried by canoes either from nearby Pangaimotu, Motutapu and other parts of Tongatapu, or possibly from as far away as Ha'apai or even Futuna.

Turn towards the sea on the dirt road just north of the Catholic church to reach a grassy area with two monumental mounds. This is Tonga's most imposing ancient burial site.

The structure closest to the main road is the **Paepae 'o Tele'a** (Platform of Tele'a), a monumental, pyramid-like stone memorial. Tele'a was a Tu'i Tonga who reigned during the 16th century, though his body is probably not inside.

The other structure, the **Langi Namoala**, has a fine example of a *fonualoto* (vault for a corpse) on top – thought to be the burial site of a female chief – but it is also empty.

To the northeast of the two principal mounds is the **'Esi'aikona**, an elevated platform used as a rest area by the chief and his family. Also nearby is the **Hehea Mound**, built during an enormous ancient land-reclamation project.

## HA'AMONGA 'A MAUI TRILITHON

The South Pacific's Stonehenge, the Ha'amonga 'a Maui (Maui's Burden) **trilithon**

(Map p693) near Niutoua, is one of ancient Polynesia's most intriguing monuments. Archaeologists and oral history credit its construction to Tu'itatui, the 11th Tu'i Tonga. The structure consists of three large coralline stones, each weighing about 40 tonnes, arranged into a trilithic gate; it's preserved in the National Historic Reserve.

It is now widely accepted that the trilithon had a similar function to Britain's Stonehenge: to track the changing seasons. Vegetation in line with the arms of the double-V design between the trilithon and the sea was cleared in 1967 and on the winter solstice the sun was seen to rise and set in perfect alignment with the clearings. On the summer solstice, the sun rose and set along the two other arms.

For the ancient Tongans, the significance of the summer solstice may have been related to the yam harvest, which was marked by the biggest festival of the year.

A walking track winds northward past several *langi* (known as the *Langi Heketa*), where fading interpretative signs make some sense of the remaining mounds of stones, including **'Esi Makafakinanga**, supposedly Tu'itatui's backrest. Such chiefly backrests were common in Polynesia and apparently Tu'itatui used this one as a shield against attack from behind while he watched construction.

Good-quality handicrafts, made by local artisans, are sold at the trilithon site.

Take the infrequent Niutoua bus (T\$1) and get off about 1km before Niutoua; the driver can indicate the spot. Head out early and return to Nuku'alofa in the early afternoon.

## 'ANAHULU CAVE

Tonga's most famous cave (Map p693) is an overlooked, slightly eerie, place full of stalactites and stalagmites blackened from the soot of flaming-frond torches and too much traffic. The cool, refreshing pool is a popular swimming spot. Bring a torch.

Opposite the cave's entrance, a path leads to a beautiful sandy cove.

Buses run to tidy Haveluliku (or Fatumu just to the south) once or twice a day (T\$1), or walk 3km from Mu'a. Take the ocean-side dirt road between the main part of Haveluliku village and the cream-and-blue church.

## Western Tongatapu

Tongatapu's west side is considered the island's 'scenic side'. A series of coves divided by rocky outcrops slope gently into clear pools on the southern coast, providing excellent swimming at high tide and an opportunity for observing the variety of marine life trapped at low tide. **Keleti Beach** (Map p693) and **Halafuoleva Beach** (Map p693) make good spots. The outer reef consists of a line of terraces and blowholes that shoot like geysers when the waves hit them at high tide. Do not swim too close to the blowholes – there's a powerful vortex that can suck you under. Taxis from Nuku'alofa cost around T\$12 each way.

## MAPU'A 'A VACA BLOWHOLES

On an especially good day at Mapu'a 'a Vaca (Chief's Whistles; Map p693), hundreds of blowholes spurt at once. They are best viewed on a windy day with a strong swell, when the water, forced up through natural vents in the coralline limestone, can shoot 30m into the air. The blowholes stretch 5km along the south coast, near the village of Houma.

To get there by public transport, take a bus from Nuku'alofa to Houma and walk 1km south to the parking area above the blowholes. The *fale kaloa* at the turn-off on the main road sells delicious cone ice cream.

## HA'ATAFU BEACH RESERVE

On the sunset side of the island, the Ha'atafu Beach Reserve (Map p693) encompasses Ha'atafu's clean, sandy beach and surrounding reef. There's protected swimming and reasonable snorkelling at high tide in the broad lagoon, and the reef-breaks offer some of the best surfing in Tonga (suitable for more experienced surfers).

The Happy Hopa Surf School (see Ha'atafu Beach Resort, following) runs one-on-one surfing lessons (A\$25 per hour) for beginners and reef novices.

The Hihifo bus passes all western Tongatapu's resorts; one-way fares from Nuku'alofa cost T\$1. A taxi costs T\$20 to T\$25.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Blue Banana Beach House** (Map p693; ☎ 41575; bluebanana@kalianet.to; d or tw per night/week T\$90/580, minimum 3 nights) Looking for a secluded,

self-contained studio cabin nestled among trees on the beach edge all to yourself? This beautifully decorated place has an outdoor shower, though the toilet is a walk away at the main house. Bring supplies or dine at nearby Nawai Ali'i.

**Ha'atafu Beach Resort** (Map p693; ☎ 41088; www.surfingtonga.com; dm half board A\$58, garden/beachfront fale per person half board A\$64/75, child 2-12yr A\$40) Mainly catering to all-inclusive surfing holidays, this lovely family-run setup is as laid-back and peaceful as you'd expect. Paths connect thatched-roof bungalows to clean, shared facilities and the dining room (sandwiches A\$2.50 to A\$6; great reports on the meals, by the way!). Facilities including snorkelling gear and paddle skis are for guest-use only.

**Otuhaaka Beach Resort** (☎ 41599; fax 24782; d fale T\$50, d bungalow T\$85, ste T\$250-270) 'Resort' is a loose term, but the open-sided Tongan *fale* restaurant (breakfast and lunch T\$3.50 to T\$12, mains T\$15) embraces an enviable slice of the beachfront. Choose a room with an updated bathroom.

**Good Samaritan Inn** (Map p693; ☎ 41022; fax 24102; fale with shared bathroom T\$23, s/d/f fale with private bathroom & breakfast from T\$69/92/115, extra person T\$23, camping per person T\$10) Behind the ocean-view restaurant (sandwiches T\$6.50 to T\$7.50, meals T\$12 to T\$14.50; open 7am to 10pm), these *fale* have an islander-style mishmash of furniture and bright prints, a fan and small fridge. The family *fale* has million-*pa'anga* surf views from its balcony. On Friday night, dine on a traditional Tongan meal accompanied by a string band and rousing Tongan culture show (T\$25). Sunday's *umu* (T\$15) is popular with locals and visitors alike. It's a good 2km walk (or hitch) from the bus stop. The resort runs airport/city transfers T\$40/10 for house and buffet guests.

## OFFSHORE ISLANDS & REEFS

### Pangaimotu

Pangaimotu is the closest island resort to Nuku'alofa and offers the best-value day trips.

With a slight castaway or pirates-lair feel, excellent **Tongan Beachcomber Resort** (Map p693; ☎ 15762, 17257; www.pangaimotu.to; tent site/hire T\$12/6, dm T\$29, s/d 1st night T\$69/104, subsequent nights T\$58/92) overlooks the water and Nuku'alofa. It serves tasty meals (snacks T\$6 to T\$8.50,

mains T\$11 to T\$20) and has five rustic, thatched *fale*. There's good snorkelling in the marine reserve and around the half-submerged wreck of *My Lady Lata II* near the landing site (note: serious spinal injuries have befallen people leaping from its bow). Snorkelling gear and fins (T\$5 each) are available. No food or drink is supposed to be brought to the island.

Sunday trips to Pangaimotu leave from Fuaa Jetty, Nuku'alofa, at 10am, 11am, noon and 1pm, returning at 3pm, 4pm, 5pm and 6pm. From Monday to Saturday the boat leaves at 10am and 11am, returning at 4pm and 5pm. The trip (adult/child return T\$15/7.50) takes about 15 minutes.

## Fafá Island

The most elegant of Tongatapu's island resorts (and one of the kingdom's best) is **Fafá Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎ 22800; www.fafa.to; d & tw superior fale US\$165, deluxe fale US\$220, extra person US\$44-55, half/full board US\$51/60), set on a magnificent beach. Spaced through palm groves, the traditional-style *fale* are perfect in their simplicity, with tall wood-shingle roofs and walls of woven palm leaves, wooden floors, white mosquito-net canopies strung over beds and private garden bathrooms with solar hot water.

The restaurant, perched behind the beach on the sunny side of the island, serves beautiful Euro-Asian-Tongan dishes featuring plenty of local seafood; it also hosts a weekly culture show and feast. Guests are free to use the water toys or join snorkelling trips, deserted island picnics and dive boats for a fee.

Day trips to Fafá (T\$57.50 including lunch) depart Fuaa Jetty at 11am and return at 4.30pm daily. One-way airport/Nuku'alofa to island transfers cost US\$21/10. Guests have complimentary twice-daily trips to Nuku'alofa.

## 'Atata

'Atata, 10km from Tongatapu, has lovely beaches, a small fishing village at its northern end and **Royal Sunset Island Resort** (Map p693; ☎ /fax 21254; www.royalsunset.to; PO Box 668, Nuku'alofa; bungalow s/d east side T\$115/160, west side T\$167/210, superior d T\$250, half/full board T\$75/86; ☎). Beachfront west-side bungalows soak up sunsets, while run-down east-side bungalows catch a few breezes. Each bungalow

has a private bathroom, ceiling fan, fridge and tea- and coffee-making facilities. The resort's Polynesian-style restaurant/bar is an incredible structure supported by immense wooden beams. Snorkelling, diving (see p698), kite-surfing and fishing are possible. Standards have slipped a little at this once bright star and recent guests have been disappointed by tired facilities.

Sunday day trips including lunch and boat transfers (45 minutes) cost T\$57.50. The boat leaves Tuimatamoana Harbour at 10am and returns at 4pm. Return airport/Nuku'alofa to island transfers cost T\$44/70.

## 'Eua

Rugged 'Eua (Map p688) is a slice of natural paradise all its own, with a growing awareness of itself as an ecotourism destination. It's no wonder travellers are inking it into their itinerary as an adventurous alternative to a simple sand-and-sea holiday.

## INFORMATION

All basic services are in the small main town of 'Ohonua.

**Friendly Islands Bookshop** (☎ 50167) Film, magazines and a few paperbacks.

**MAF** (☎ 50122) This is a good source of information about the 'Eua Plantation Forest, 'Eua National Park and other bush areas.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The ocean crashes over rocks on 'Eua's shore, providing few safe swimming beaches, though wading in rock pools at the right tide is an option.

Contact Deep Blue Diving Centre (p698) to experience Tonga's largest sea caves, just off 'Eua, in visibility of over 60m all year round. One is likened to a cathedral.

## Northern 'Eua

'Eua's northern tip is relatively inaccessible, but has some impressive features, including **Kahana Spring** and the nearby dramatic cliff-top **viewpoints**, from where you can scramble down to isolated **Fangutave Beach**. From there it's possible to hike through the rainforest to some spectacular hidden **caves**. The tracks can be difficult to find, so be sure to seek local advice, or better still, go with a local guide (see Tours, p706).

### Central 'Eua

The eastern part of central 'Eua is covered with Tonga's greatest extent of natural rainforest, with dense junglelike growth, giant tree ferns and vines and a couple of enormous, ancient banyan trees. The 'Eua National Park and 'Eua Plantation Forest cover much of the area, which is underlaid with eroded limestone, causing a Swiss-cheese landscape of caves and sinkholes. Pick up a map of trails from the Hideaway (right).

Central 'Eua's highlights are the **Hafu Pool**; the dramatic **Lauua & Lokupo lookouts** overlooking the park, beach and pounding ocean; and the **'Ana Kuma** (Rat's Cave), where those who brave the unnerving drop into it are rewarded by spectacular views.

### Southern 'Eua

Southern 'Eua's **Lakufa'anga** area contains the island's finest geological features, though you'll probably want to organise transport or a bike to reach them. The area's most prominent site is the **Rock Garden**, a collection of bizarrely shaped eroded coral slabs surrounded by a grassy meadow with wild horses. Close by is the **Liangahu'o 'a Maui**, a giant limestone arch. Across the arch is the **Bowl of Cliffs**, an impressive half-circle of cliffs between which the sea churns like a flushing toilet bowl.

### TOURS

The Hideaway (right) assists guests plan unguided **hikes** and runs guided walks to 'Eua's prime sites (T\$45 with lunch), one including the caves of the remote north (T\$60).

Island tours can be organised with the Hideaway (T\$45 including lunch), Susan's Guest House (right; T\$40) and Taina's Place (right; adult/child T\$45/free).

The Hideaway also organises half-day whale-watching boat trips (with one/two/three people for T\$150/125/100 per person).

### SLEEPING

All accommodation on 'Eua is of the budget variety. Hosts generally offer wharf transfers for T\$4.

If your plan is to stay just the one night, you could sleep on a bench or floor space on the ferry and spare yourself the pre-4am wake-up call to head down to the ferry.

**Hideaway** (☎ 50255; [www.kalianet.to/hideawayeua](http://www.kalianet.to/hideawayeua); Tufuvai village; camping T\$12, s/d incl breakfast T\$40/50) This is the first choice for most travellers to 'Eua. Its viewing platform, built over the rocky shore, makes for fantastic sunset viewing and whale watching (June to December). Comfortable motel-style rooms have good, hot showers. Breakfast is T\$6 to T\$8.

**Taina's Place** (☎ 50186; Telefoni Rd; camping per tent T\$10, tent hire T\$15, cabin s/d/tr T\$20/30/40) Five cute houses are arranged in gardens near the forest. Bathroom facilities are nearby and the communal lounge/kitchen area is an easy spot to relax in. Kitchen use per day is T\$5; breakfast is T\$6. The newly built family house has its own kitchen.

Other options:

**Susan's Guest House** (☎ 50088; s/d T\$20/30, extra person T\$10) Rooms are basic in this friendly family home. Breakfast is T\$7 to T\$8, dinner T\$12. A Sunday *umu* (T\$12) can be arranged.

**Highlight Guest House** (☎ 50143; Mata'ahu village; s/d T\$25/40; kitchen use T\$5) Rooms in a spacious house. Breakfast/lunch/dinner T\$6/8/12.

**Deep Resort** (☎ 50421; [moanas@kalianet.to](mailto:moanas@kalianet.to); Tufuvai village; dm T\$25, s/d incl breakfast T\$40/80) Three newish and roomy log-look cabins in an unbeatable position on Tufuvai Beach.

### EATING

The Ta'anga Supermarket and Tonga Co-operative Federation in 'Ohonua have limited stocks, but it's advisable to bring some supplies from Nuku'alofa.

Cooked meals are available at all accommodation places, for guests and nonguests (book by noon). The most popular is the Hideaway's ocean-view bar-restaurant (dinner T\$18 to T\$20), while the Deep Resort's Tongan-style bar-restaurant (meals T\$7.50 to T\$20) is a charming spot to sit and soak up afternoon beverages and crashing surf. Taina's expansive dinner spreads (T\$15 to T\$18) include Tongan specialities (fish, coconut cream curry and *'ota ika*).

### ENTERTAINMENT

The Hideaway and the Deep Resort have bars that are open to guests and nonguests. The Maxi Disco Hall is alcohol-free, but visitors – especially women – are advised to avoid it, as the risk of harassment is very high.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

On a calm day there is nothing to the 1½- to 2½-hour ferry trip between 'Eua and Tongatapu (T\$17 one way), but it can get very rough.

There is no bus service but you can organise transport with accommodation hosts. Bike and horse hire can be arranged at Taina's Place (T\$12) and the Hideaway (bike/horse T\$15/30).

**Airlines Tonga Air Fiji** ([www.airlinestonga.com](http://www.airlinestonga.com)) makes the 10-minute flight from Tongatapu to 'Eua's Kaufanga Airport (one way T\$45) twice daily. Bookings are through Teta Tours (p698).

### Minerva Reef

This reef (Map p688), awash most of the time, is Tonga's southernmost extremity. It lies 350km southwest of Tongatapu and serves as a rest point for yachts travelling from Tonga to NZ.

## HA'APAI GROUP

pop 8400 / area 110 sq km

Sprinkled across the kingdom's central waters, Ha'apai's islands appear like the idyllic South Pacific paradise: low coral islands, vibrant reefs, deserted white beaches and even the odd volcano. Those willing to forgo the trimmings reap the rewards – even bare-brass budgeters can walk across a reef for their slice of paradise in a thatched *fale* on a large patch of sand. And only a scattering of tourists visit each year. It's a sleepy, seductive place, well off the beaten track – and you get the feeling the people would prefer to keep it that way.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

Ha'apai's Salote Pilolevu Airport is 3km north of Pangai on Lifuka. **Peau Vava'u** (office ☎ 60717; cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds) flies at least daily (except Sunday) between Ha'apai and Tongatapu, and three times a week between Ha'apai and Vava'u. See p730 for details.

##### Boat

The MV *'Olovaha* and the MV *Pulupaki* stop twice weekly at Pangai on Lifuka on

both their northbound and southbound runs between Tongatapu and Vava'u. See p731 for ferry details.

There are marginally protected anchorages along the lee shores of Lifuka, Foa, Ha'ano, Uoleva, Ha'afeva, Nomuka and Nomuka'iki.

### GETTING AROUND

#### To/From the Airport & Wharf

Most places to stay offer free airport pick-ups and will arrange drop-offs. Taxis charge T\$5 between the airport and Pangai on Lifuka, while the sporadic bus service between Pangai and the airport turn-off costs T\$1.

### Bicycle

Lifuka and Foa are flat. Some guesthouses have bicycles for guest use (and may rent out any surplus), and Penny's (p710) hires out bikes. Expect to pay T\$8 to T\$15 per day.

### Boat

The TVB and guesthouses will generally assist in arranging boat transport around the islands.

### Bus

A sporadic bus service operates between Hihifo, south of Pangai on Lifuka, and Faleloa on Foa roughly between 8am and 4pm weekdays and 8am and noon Saturday. The trip from Pangai to Faleloa costs T\$1. There's a bus stop on the corner of Holopeka and Fau Rds.

### Taxi

Several taxis operate in Pangai; try **John** (☎ 60124), **Siaosi** (☎ 60072) or **Ioane** (☎ 60509). The fare around town is T\$2.

### Activities

Sandy, deserted beaches and uninhabited islands may be all you need for a perfect trip to Ha'apai, but activities such as cultural explorations, foot-powered reef crossings, cycling, horse riding, snorkelling, diving and whale watching can be easily added to the mix.

**Happy Ha'apai Divers** (☎ 60639; [www.tonga-dive.com](http://www.tonga-dive.com); PO Box 61, Pangai), based at Sandy Beach Resort on Foa, focuses on long, slow dives around the north Lifuka Group. One/two dives costs US\$65/90 and rental gear is

## WILLIAM MARINER

Thanks to a series of serendipitous incidents, the world has an extensive account of the customs, language, religion and politics of pre-Christian Tonga.

In February 1805 15-year-old William Charles Mariner went to sea on the privateer *Port-au-Prince*. The voyage took the ship across the Atlantic, around Cape Horn, up the west coast of South America, to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands and finally into Tonga's Ha'apai Group. The crew anchored at the northern end of Lifuka and was immediately welcomed with yams and barbecued pork. Their reception seemed friendly enough, but the following day the crew members became suspicious that some sort of plot was afoot. The ship's captain chose to ignore their fears.

On 1 December 1806 an attack was launched while 300 Tongans were aboard the ship. The British, sorely outnumbered, decided to destroy the ship, its crew and its attackers rather than allow it to be taken. Young Mariner was captured and escorted ashore.

Mariner was persecuted by the Tongans until he was summoned by Finau 'Ulukalala I, the reigning chief of Ha'apai. The king assumed that Mariner was the captain's son and ordered the young man's life to be spared.

Meanwhile, the *Port-au-Prince*, which hadn't been destroyed, was dragged ashore, raided and burned. The conflagration heated the cannons sufficiently to cause them to fire, creating panic among the Tongans. Mariner pantomimed an explanation of the phenomenon, initiating a rapport with the Tongans that would carry him through the next four years.

Mariner was taken under the wing of Finau and became privy to most of the goings-on in Tongan politics. He learned the language well and travelled with the chief, observing and absorbing the finer points of Tongan ceremony and protocol. He was given the name *Toki 'Ukamea* (Iron Axe) and Finau appointed one of his royal wives, Mafi Hape, to be Mariner's adoptive mother.

After the death of Finau, the king's son permitted young William to leave Tonga on a passing English vessel. Back in England, Mariner married, fathered 12 children and became an unsuccessful stockbroker. Were it not for a chance meeting with an amateur anthropologist, Dr John Martin, his unique Tongan experiences might have been lost. Martin, fascinated with Mariner's tale, suggested collaboration on a book, and the result, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, is a masterpiece of Pacific literature.

William Mariner drowned in a canal in southern England in 1853.

available; see the website for package details. Two-day diving trips to Tofua and Kao were set to commence in 2006. For more on diving in the Vava'u Group, see p74. Sea kayaks cost US\$20 per day and small-group whale-watching trips cost US\$45/70 per half-/full day (including snorkelling gear).

Camping experiences on remote islands include fishing, possible whale sightings and the very cool experience of just being out there.

**Mariners Guided Camping Tours** (☎ 60374; www.tongacamping.com) tempts with combined kayaking/camping/hiking trips to Ha'apai's more remote islands: some are uninhabited; some offer a traditional cultural experience; and one has an active volcano. It also organises whale-watching trips between August and October.

Friendly Islands Kayak Company (p717) also offers organised kayaking in Ha'apai.

## LIFUKA GROUP

Most accommodation and services are located within the Lifuka Group. Lifuka Island, with its capital Pangai, is the centre of Ha'apai's limited activity.

### Lifuka

Petite Pangai, Lifuka's main town, has a pleasantly soporific atmosphere and holds Lifuka's basic services. There's little to do except wander the empty beaches that nearly encircle the island, although there's some good snorkelling off the sheltered western beaches.

### INFORMATION

The water supply in Ha'apai should be used only for washing and bathing. Only drink water collected in rainwater cisterns.

**Friendly Islands Bookshop** (☎ 60198; Holopeka Rd)

Stocks a few titles on Tonga, magazines, film and fishing supplies.

**Niu'ui Hospital** (☎ 60201; Hihifo) Basic facilities.

Appointments are necessary and the pharmacy is open 8.30am to 4.30pm.

**Post office** (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds) Mail can be sent c/o Post Office, Pangai, Ha'apai. The Customs & Inland Revenue office is also based here.

**Tonga visitors bureau** (TVB; ☎/fax 60733; www.tongaholiday.com; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A sometimes helpful office that posts tide timetables and may assist with accommodation bookings, horse-riding or boat charter queries.

**Westpac Bank of Tonga** (☎ 60933; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Exchanges foreign currencies (cash and travellers cheques), gives cash advances on Visa and MasterCard and also deals with MoneyGram cash transfers. Phonecards are sold here.

### SIGHTS

#### Afa Historical Museum

This tiny museum (Holopeka Rd; ☎ opening times vary) displays pieces of 3000-year-old Lapita pottery, traditional headrests, old photographs, rocks from Tofua and items used in the production of handicrafts. A folder of newspaper clippings covers the history and geology of volcanic Tofua, but there is little other signage.

#### Shirley Baker Monument & European Cemetery

About 800m north of Pangai, the grave and monument of Reverend Shirley Baker, Tonga's first prime minister and adviser to King George Tupou I, stands amid the graves of various 19th- and early-20th-century German and English traders and missionaries. A Tongan cemetery, with decorated sand and coral mounds, is directly opposite.

#### Hihifo's Archaeological Sites

Hihifo, the village south of Pangai, hides some archaeological relics seemingly of more interest to rooting pigs than anyone else. Hidden behind a low wire fence in a grove of ironwood is **Olovehi Tomb** (Loto Kolo Rd), the burial ground for people holding the noble title of Tuita.

About 1.2km south of Pangai, a turning towards the east leads to the circular **Velata Mound Fortress**, a type of ring ditch fortification found throughout Tonga, Fiji and Samoa.

#### Southern Lifuka

From Hihifo, a dirt road continues to **Hulu'ipaongo Point**, with its sweep of white

beach (and a disappointing nonbiodegradable waste problem). About 200m short of the beach is **Hulu'ipaongo Tomb**, the burial site of the Mata'uave line of chiefs.

### SLEEPING

All accommodation in Pangai is basic.

**Fonongava'inga Guesthouse** (☎ 60038; vimahi@kalianet.to; Palace Rd, Pangai; s/d/tr T\$15/25/45) The broad veranda and homely, light-filled communal lounge make this recommended place, also known as Langilangi Guesthouse, worth the few minutes' walk from the centre of town. Langilangi enjoys teaching local crafts to guests. Breakfast is T\$6, dinner T\$20 to T\$30, kitchen use per day T\$3.

**Fifita Guesthouse** (☎ 60213; Fafu Rd, Pangai; s/d incl breakfast T\$25/35, f with sitting room T\$65) Fifita's central location behind Mariners Café and just a short walk from the wharf makes it a popular place. It's basic but friendly, with plenty of travel banter exchanged (sometimes loudly) in the communal kitchen. Lack of a lounge makes it a bit drab during rainy periods.

**Billy's Place** (☎ 60336; s/d fale incl breakfast T\$55/65, larger fale T\$65/75, self-contained fale T\$100, minimum 2-night stay) Ropes of buoys dangle from pandanus roots between Billy's open-sided dining terrace (lunch/dinner T\$12/20) and views of breaking surf (and whales in season) beyond the quiet beach. Boardwalk paths wind through gardens, connecting secluded bungalows with clean, shared facilities nearby (kitchen use T\$5 per day). Nonguests can enjoy the food here, and a Sunday *umu* can be arranged. Situated 1.5km northeast of Pangai, lone travellers could relish the peace or feel a bit isolated. It's a 10-minute bike ride (free mountain bikes are available for guests) or a T\$4 taxi ride. No children under 12.

Other options on Lifuka:

**Mele Tonga Guesthouse** (☎ 60042; Holopeka Rd, Holopeka; house d T\$20, traditional fale s/d T\$20/30) A secluded, beachfront traditional Tongan fale and standard rooms in the house, located five minutes' walk from the airport. Breakfast/lunch/dinner costs T\$8/10/12.

**Lindsay Guesthouse** (☎/fax 60107; cnr Loto Kolo & Tuita Rds, Pangai; s/d/f T\$20/30/50) A clean and friendly spot, with a broad veranda and communal sitting room and kitchen, and the warm and irresistible scent of baking bread wafting across the lawn from the bakery. Bikes (T\$8) are available for guests. Breakfast is T\$6 to T\$10, dinner T\$15 to T\$20.

**'Evaloni's Guesthouse** (☎ 60029; Loto Kolo Rd, Pangai; s/d T\$15/25, d with private bathroom from T\$45) A ramshackle range of fan-cooled rooms (the upstairs rooms are nicer) and a tapa-lined veranda on which to shoot some pool. Order meals in advance (breakfast T\$15) or use the well-equipped kitchen (kitchen use T\$1.50).

### EATING

There are few options to eat out in Pangai. Guesthouses accept nonguests for dinner with advance bookings, and Foa (below) offers further options.

**Mariners Café** (☎ 60374; VHF Channel 16; Fau Rd; meals & snacks T\$6.50-16.50; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun, occasionally closed 3-5pm to go fishing) You won't fully appreciate the lure of Mariners until you've spent some time on Ha'apai's shores. This relaxed social mecca is Lifuka's only real restaurant (and bar substitute) and fortunately has a good range of tasty and fresh dishes. It's a good place to come for local knowledge.

**Penny's** (Waterfront; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a lovely view over the harbour from the 1st floor of the green waterfront building, Penny's plans to serve meals and hire out bicycles (T\$15).

**Matuku-ae-tau Bakery** (Lindsay Guesthouse, cnr Loto Kolo & Tuita Rds; ☒ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 5-8pm Sun) The bakery's two ovens keep the island in bread, jam-filled rolls and *keki* (which are similar to doughnuts). There's a mad rush on Sunday afternoon.

**Pangai'isi Supermarket** (☒ 7am-11pm), opposite the wharf, has different stock from the **Tonga Cooperative Federation** (Holopeka Rd), though both are limited. The *fale koloa* (general stores) around town each stock basic necessities and their own extras, such as cakes, eggs or frozen chicken. Pickings are often slim at **Pangai Market** (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rd; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat); head down early in the day for fresh produce.

### SHOPPING

**Women's Island Development Handicraft Shop** (☎ 60478; Loto Kolo Rd) Local women sell their tapa, cards and various woven items made from pandanus leaves here.

### Foa

Houmale'eia Beach, on the tip of quiet Foa, is the best beach on the 'mainland', with sandy water access, sublime views of Nukunamo and some beautiful snorkelling. The

heavily wooded island is connected by a causeway to Lifuka.

### SLEEPING

**Matafonua Watersports Resort** (Sandy Beach ☎/fax 60600; www.sandybeachresort.de; fale d & tw T\$80) These uncluttered, elevated *fale* have water views over foreshore foliage and mosquito nets over beds. Purpose-built as a dive resort in 2006, it offers freshwater supply showers in well-designed shared facilities. Kids are welcome. A kiosk-style café-bar overlooks Nukunamo.

**Sandy Beach Resort** (☎/fax 60600; www.sandybeachresort.de; d US\$140) Long regarded as one of Tonga's best resorts, Sandy Beach's comfortable (if plain) bungalows are oriented for sunset views over the magnificent white-sand Houmale'eia Beach. Rates include freshwater/solar-heated showers, complimentary bicycles, snorkelling gear, kayaks and airport and town (bank) transfers. No children under 12. Depending on guest numbers, nonguests may be able to book for upscale three-course dinners (call before noon; US\$29). Sandwiches, burgers, pizza and cocktails are served at the terrace bar (snacks T\$7 to T\$15). Breakfast is US\$9.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

A sporadic bus service from Pangai stops at Faleloa (T\$1 one way), a 25-minute walk from the resorts and Houmale'eia Beach. By bicycle from Pangai takes around 45 minutes; the taxi fare is about T\$15.

### Nukunamo

The enticing picture-postcard island viewed from the tip of Foa is Nukunamo, an uninhabited island with a shining white beach covered with beautiful shells. Take flip-flops/sandals to walk around the island. At low tide, you can snorkel to Nukunamo over the life-filled coral heads between the islands. Only confident swimmers should attempt this, and only with local advice, as the currents through the pass can be powerful. You can also cross by kayak (see p707 to hire a kayak from Happy Ha'apai Divers).

### Ha'ano

Cultural travellers will get a good dose of traditional Tongan life on the strikingly clean and friendly island of Ha'ano. To get

there, take one of the following options: charter a boat (T\$50 one way); wait for the water taxis from Faleloa jetty, on Foa, early morning and mid-afternoon (around T\$5 one way); or paddle a double kayak across from Foa (see p707 to hire a kayak from Happy Ha'apai Divers).

### Uoleva

If you're looking for paradise on a budget, Uoleva is the place to come for it. It's ultrabasic with little to do other than swim, snorkel and fish – perfect!

### SLEEPING

Uoleva's very basic accommodation has unbeatable, absolute beachfront positions on a broad, white-sand beach on the northwest coast. Bring your own drinks, some food and mosquito repellent and inform owners in advance if you want meals. There's no love lost between Uoleva's 'resort' owners.

**Daiana Resort** (☎ 60612; s/d/f fale T\$18/25/45; breakfast/dinner T\$5/12) Ponder the stars and lapping waves over the nightly beach bonfire at this absolute beach-bum paradise. Tapa-lined *fale* have mats over sandy floors and enclosed sitting areas. Bathroom facilities are rudimentary (water is pumped from the well for a shower), but this contributes to Daiana's charm.

**Captain Cook Resort** (☎ 77106, 60014; s/d cabins T\$18/25) Dappled sunlight streams through shade-giving trees onto the attractive, sandy grounds around these basic wood-panelled cabins. The blue, absolute beachfront cabin is the pick of the bunch. Lone travellers (particularly women) have found this, at times edgy, environment uncomfortably isolated. Breakfast/dinner is T\$6/12, kitchen use per day T\$4.50

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

You can walk/wade between the southern tip of Lifuka and the northern tip of Uoleva at low tide, but get local advice (and a tide chart from the TVB) before you attempt it. It takes 40 minutes to walk from Pangai to the southern tip of Lifuka (taxi T\$5), around 20 minutes between the islands, and a further hour or so to reach Uoleva's resorts.

Both resorts offer transfers for guests from Pangai (T\$15 one way). To charter a small boat for the day (around T\$50)

contact the TVB, the resorts themselves or Pangai guesthouses.

### 'Uiha

The conservative and traditional island of 'Uiha is a friendly place with two villages: 'Uiha, with a wharf, and Felemea, about 1.5km south.

In the centre of 'Uiha village is a large, elevated burial ground containing several ancient **royal tombs**. At the village church are two **cannons**, souvenirs taken from a Peruvian blackbirding (slaving) ship – attacked and destroyed by the locals in 1863.

**'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay** (☎ 60605, 60438; VHF Channel 16 or book through TVB; fale s/d T\$20/25) You'll get a good introduction to village life at this friendly, welcoming place right on the beach at Felemea. Snooze in a thatch-and-fibro *fale* by night and swing in a hammock by day. Shared facilities are clean and there's a small kitchen (T\$3), or with notice the owners will prepare delicious Tongan food (breakfast T\$6, dinner T\$12 to T\$15).

The TVB in Pangai can arrange boat transport for around T\$10 per person each way. 'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay provides transfers for T\$25/30 for one/two people, one way.

### OTHER HA'APAI GROUP ISLANDS

Some inter-island ferries stop at or near **Hafeva**, around 40km southwest of Lifuka, a friendly (if crowded) island with beautiful views of Tofua and Kao and great sunsets.

Petite **Nomuka** and its companion island, **Numuka'iki**, receive few visitors, but can be explored on organised camping/kayaking trips (see p707) from Tonagatapu or Lifuka.

### Tofua & Kao

Pyramidal Kao (1109m) and its smoking partner, Tofua (507m), are visible from Lifuka. Tofua is the most active of Tonga's volcanoes and entices the intrepid to venture to remote shores, hike up its Jurassic Park-cum-moon-scape crater and peer into its glowing caldera. At the bottom of the crater is a beautiful, crystal-clear lake.

The crater rim is a tough 1¼-hour climb. From 50m due south of the old school at Hokala, follow the track through forest, tree ferns and ironwood; the vegetation gradually gets shorter as you climb. Look out for the beautiful orchids.

Just offshore is where the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty* occurred (see p424). Divers enter a whole new realm exploring blackened walls laden with colourful corals here, while pelagics rise from the depths nearby.

Hiking on Kao is not recommended without a guide.

Reaching Tofua or Kao is not easy. You may be able to charter the Ministry of Education's launch *MV Pako* (T\$1700 with crew for five days, plus T\$10 per hour waiting time). Happy Ha'apai Divers and Mariners Guided Camping Tours (see p707) organise diving and camping/hiking trips to the islands.

It's essential to carry plenty of food and water.

## VAVA'U GROUP

pop 16,200 / area 119 sq km

Vava'u is picturesque at every turn, but to really experience it you have to get out on the water. Regarded as one of the world's great sailing locations, Vava'u is the holiday activity destination in Tonga: sea kayaking, mountain biking, hiking, impressive game fishing, surfing, diving and even abseiling into caves are all possible here.

High cliffs plunge straight into the surf in the north of this tranquil island group, while summits of small islands and islets peek above the surface of the water, surrounded by white sand and vibrant coral reefs in the south. Quiet villages nestled into emerald hills are scattered across the 50-odd islands.

### Climate

Vava'u is warmer than Tongatapu and has the wettest climate in Tonga. Most of the rain falls in occasional storms between late November and April, which is also cyclone season.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

Lupepau'u Airport is about a 15-minute drive north of Neiafu. **Peau Vava'u** (Airport ☎ 71403; Neiafu Map pp716-17; ☎ 71480; Fatafehi Rd) flies between Tongatapu and Vava'u, and Ha'apai and Vava'u. See p730. Weekly flights service the Niuas from Vava'u.

See p730 for details on weekly flights between Samoa and Vava'u on **Polynesian Airlines** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70644; inside Puataukanave Supermarket; Fatafehi Rd).

##### Boat

See p731 for inter-island ferry information. The ferry offices are at Neiafu's main wharf.

### GETTING AROUND

#### To/From the Airport

Some accommodation, including island resorts, offer airport transfers. The Paradise International Hotel bus meets all incoming flights and is free/T\$5 for guests/nonguests. Taxis charge T\$12 for the airport-Neiafu trip.

##### Bicycle

Vava'u is hilly, but fairly manageable by bicycle. Adventure Backpackers (p719) rents out good bikes (half-/full day T\$13/20) and Friendly Islands Kayak Company (p717) runs mountain-bike tours.

##### Boat

For details, see p715.

##### Bus

Buses run from Sailoame and 'Utakalonga Markets to most parts of Vava'u and its connected islands, leaving when full. They usually make the run into town in the morning and return in the afternoon, so they're not very convenient for day trips from town.

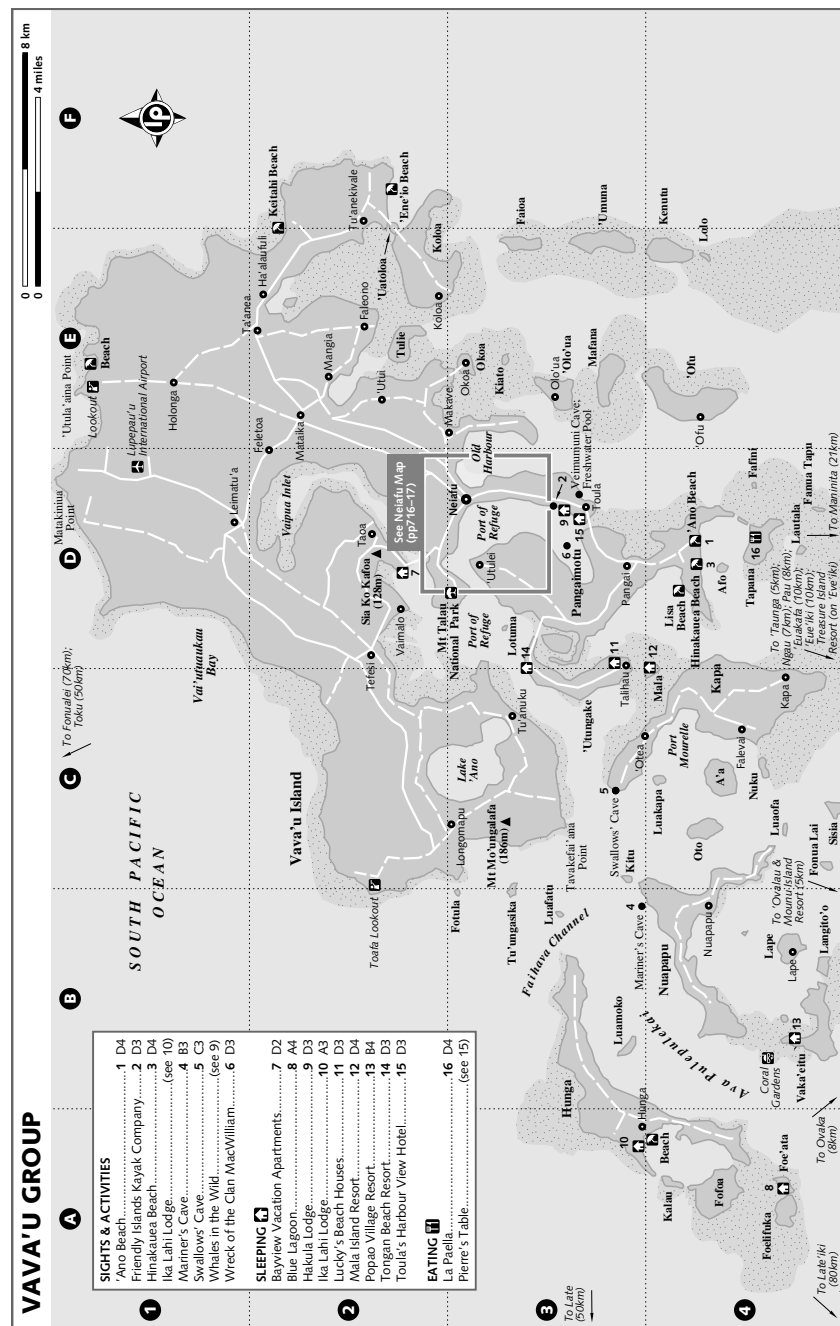
##### Car

Tongan licences are available from the **Police Station** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 922, 70236; Tu'i Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon & Tue, to 12.30pm Wed-Fri).

**JL Rental Cars** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71128; Kovana Rd) has a few rental cars for T\$65 per day. Taxi drivers will often rent out their vehicles for a negotiable fee of around T\$55 to T\$65 per day (advice from experience: check the brakes!).

##### Taxi

Taxis charge T\$3 around Neiafu, T\$10 to 'Ano and Hinakauea Beaches and T\$12/14 to the airport/Talihaui village. Taxi companies in Neiafu include **JV Taxi & Rental Cars** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70136, 71136; Fatafehi Rd) and **Liviela** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70240; Fatafehi Rd).



## NEIAFU

pop 5900

Nestled between several low hills in the Port of Refuge, Neiafu is Tonga's most picturesque town, and home to restaurants, bars and a Friday yacht race (p717). On Sunday the town is mostly quiet, aside from the vibrant and uplifting singing emanating from numerous churches.

### Information

Vava'u has its own radio station: FM1, at 89.3FM. A yachties' information net is on VHF Channel 6 at 8.30am Monday to Saturday.

### BOOKSHOPS

Most places to stay have libraries and/or book exchanges for guests. Tropical Tease (p721) has a selection of titles for exchange. **Friendly Islands Bookshop** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70505; Fatafehi Rd) A few excellent titles on Tonga, as well as magazines and film.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Café Tropicana** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71322; Fatafehi Rd; per 15min T\$3) This café also burns CDs.

**Coconet Café** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71311; VHF Channel 16; per 5min T\$1; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Waterfront, below Tongan Bob's.

**Maamamo'onia Hall** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70570; Tu'i Rd; 1hr T\$5; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Sat) In the school.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Italian Clinic & Pharmacy** (Map pp716-17; ☎/fax 70607; i\_clinic@kalianetvav.to; Main Wharf; clinic ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-10.30am Sat, pharmacy ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) Consultations with Dr Alfredo Carafa cost T\$25 to T\$35; a dive health certification is T\$25.

**Prince Wellington Ngu Hospital** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70201; Mateialona Rd; ☎ 24hr) For emergencies.

### MONEY

The Westpac Bank of Tonga, ANZ, Western Union and MBF, all on Fatafehi Rd (Map pp716-17), change cash and travellers cheques. All open until around 11.30am on Saturday, except for ANZ, which has a 24-hour ATM with Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus facilities.

### POST

**Post office** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70002; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) North of Utukalongalu market. Poste

restante mail (c/o General Delivery, Post Office, Neiafu, Vava'u).

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tonga visitors bureau** (TVB; Map pp716-17; ☎ 70115; fax 70666; VHF Channel 16; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A well-stocked office with helpful, well-informed staff happy to assist with bookings and accommodation reservations.

### Sights

Taking in the Port of Refuge view of yachts bobbing on their moorings from a café or bar may be the only sight you need to see in Neiafu.

Standing high above the Port of Refuge, on Fatafehi Rd, colonial-style **St Joseph's Cathedral** (Map pp716-17) is the most prominent structure and acts as a beacon for arriving yachties. The stretch of road along the waterfront cliff below the cathedral is **Hala Lupe** (Way of Doves), named for the mournful singing of the female prisoners (convicted of adultery by the church) who constructed it.

A staircase leads down to the **IFAW Marine Awareness Centre** (Map pp716-17; www.ifaw.org), an excellent place to learn more about humpback whales and their conservation.

### OLD HARBOUR

Near the entrance to the sunken Hala Tafengatoto (Road where Blood Flows) pathway in eastern Neiafu are several **freshwater springs** bubbling into the Old Harbour. The most reliable is **Matalave**, which lies around the harbour to the east. Nearby is the rocky outcrop said to have been the primary Vava'u landing site of the *kalia*, the double-hulled canoes used in ancient times.

### MT TALAU NATIONAL PARK

The flat-topped mountain dominating the Port of Refuge, 131m Mt Talau (Mo'unga Talau; Map pp716-17), is protected in the Mt Talau National Park. From the centre of Neiafu, travel west past the rugby field along Tapueluelu Rd and up through a residential area for around 2km, until the road narrows into a bush track. When it begins to descend, a side track turns off to the right and leads steeply up over slippery rock surfaces to the summit, where you get a great view. There's a marked trail through the park (45-minute circuit) linking four viewpoints.

## Activities

Offering boat-based tours, **Vava'u Surf & Adventure Tours** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71283, 12515; http://groups.msn.com/CafeTropicanaVavauTonga/), has received glowing reports from surf travellers for its laid-back surf trips (half-/full day per person T\$75/105). One incorporates abseiling into a sinkhole on Kapa Island and swimming out of Swallows' Cave (T\$130; p723). Surf/accommodation packages can be arranged.

### DIVING & SNORKELLING

Vava'u's dive sites range from hard and soft coral gardens and encrusted wrecks to vast sea caves and other geological marvels.

**Dolphin Pacific Diving** (Map pp716-17; ☎/fax 70292; VHF Channel 71; www.dolphinpacifcdiving.com) is a friendly operation on the waterfront beside Puataukanave Motel. It offers two-/three-tank boat dives (T\$140/200), snorkelling trips (T\$60) and runs PADI (Professional Association of Dive Instructors)/IDEA (International Diving Educators Association) Open Water courses (T\$550/500) and a great-value 'dive and whale-watch combination' for T\$180, which includes two tank dives. Sunset cruises (T\$40) and sole boat charters (T\$800) are also options. Snorkelling gear is available for hire.

**Beluga Diving** (Map pp716-17; ☎/fax 70327; VHF Channel 16; www.belugadivingvavau.com), on the waterfront at Fangafoa Marina, offers one-/two-tank dives (from US\$35/65) and PADI Open Water courses (US\$230). Snorkelling gear (US\$12) and guided boat-based snorkelling trips (US\$25 including gear, minimum four snorkellers) are also available. Check the gear before heading out on a boat.

The majority of boat tours and some whale-watching trips include a little snorkelling into Mariner's and Swallows' Caves or over coral gardens. Diving, fishing and whale-watching operators will run snorkelling trips out of whale-watching season for around T\$80. A good **snorkelling** day trip would be to head out to Mala Island Resort (p722) for lunch and snorkel from its beach to the beautiful Japanese Gardens nearby.

For more on diving in the Vava'u Group, see p74.

### FISHING

Vava'u is regarded as one of the best game-fishing destinations in the Pacific and a prime site for catching marlin.

The Ikapuna Store (p721) in Neiafu is stocked with lures etc and may have fishing gear to rent.

Low season (January to April) reductions may be possible and most fishing charters listed here can be contacted on VHF Channel 71.

**Dora Malia** (Ikapuna Store; ☎ 70698; ikapuna@kalianet.to; PO Box 106) Two/four anglers for T\$600/800 per day.

**Hakula Sport Fishing Charters** (☎ 70872, 71381; www.fishtonga.com; PO Box 23) Boat charter A\$900 for up to six anglers. Operated by Hakula Lodge (p719).

**Target One** (☎/fax 70647; www.visitvavau.com/target1; Private Bag 3) Charters US\$500/600/700 for two/three/four anglers.

**Ika Lahi Lodge** (Map p713; ☎/fax 70611; www.tongafishing.com; PO Box 24) Based on Hunga Island, charters NZ\$800/1400 per half-/full day, maximum four anglers.

### SAILING & BOATING

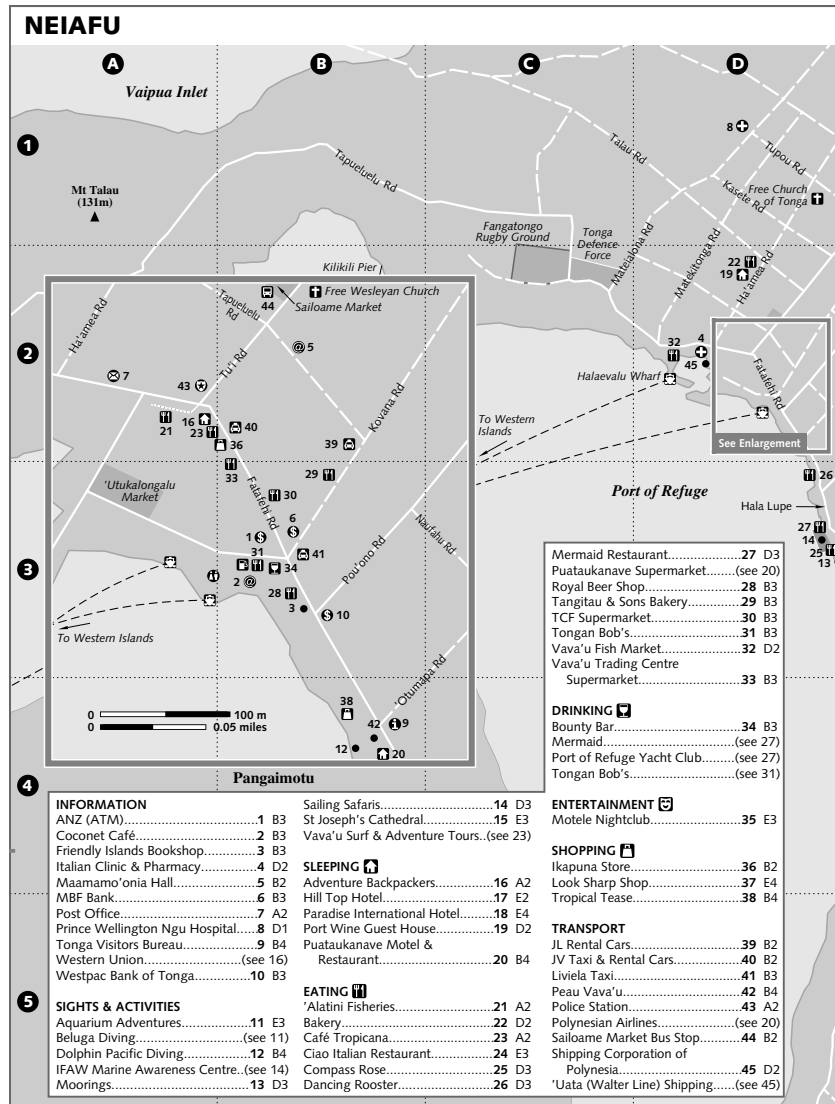
This is the perfect way to experience Vava'u: cruising the islands and stopping off to snorkel and wander beaches at will.

Down the steps from the cliff, **Moorings** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70016; VHF Channel 72; www.southpacificsailing.com, www.moorings.co.nz) charters out catamarans and monohulls ranging from 12m to 15m, which sleep up to 10 passengers. Prices vary according to the season, but range from NZ\$480 to NZ\$1450 for bare-boat charters during high season. Additional costs for a skipper/cook/guide are NZ\$170/140/140 plus food per day. Check its websites for details and book direct.

**Melinda Sea Adventures** (☎ 70975, 70861; VHF Channel 16; www.sailtonga.com) operates the traditionally rigged gaff ketch, *Melinda*, a beautiful sight under sail in Vava'u. Fully crewed, minimum three-day charters (two to four guests) cost US\$175 per person per day. Day trips (whole boat charter US\$350) and whale watching are also available.

**SY Impetuous** (www.sailtonga.com) is a fully crewed 15.5m Beneteau available for day sails around Vava'u (up to 10 people) and flexible longer charters, including pick-up/drop-off in Ha'apai, Nuku'alofa, Fiji or Samoa. Fully catered charters cost US\$190 per person per day for a maximum of six people in three double cabins. There's a dive compressor on board.

Down the steps from the cliff, near Moorings, **Sailing Safaris** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70650; VHF Channel 68; sailingsafaris@kalianetvav.to; www.sailing safaris.com; PO Box 46, Neiafu) rents out an 8m yacht



(bare boat/skippered from US\$150/250 per day) and also runs five-day live-aboard sailing courses for US\$1500 (up to two people). Skippered speedboats are available for US\$300 per day.

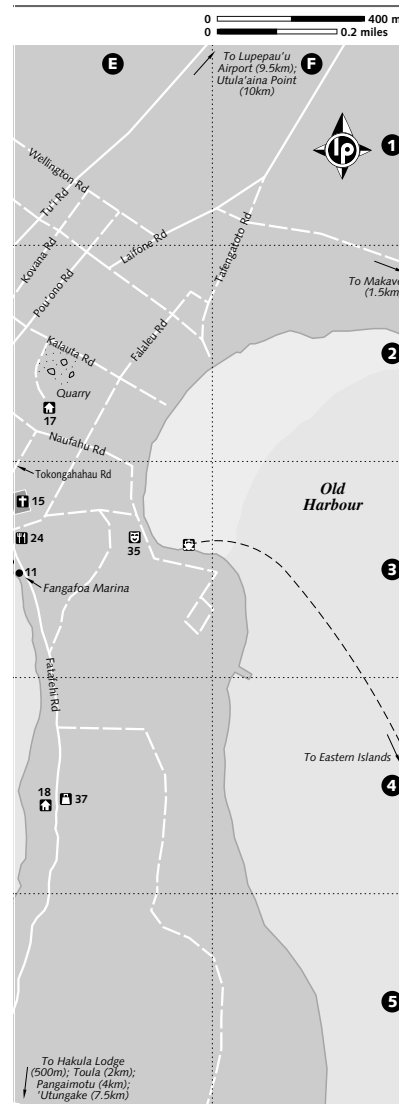
Coconet Café (see p714) rents small power boats (half-/full day T\$70/80) and **Aquarium Adventures** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70493;

aquariumadventures@yahoo.com; Fangafoa Marina) hires out sailing dinghies (hour/day T\$25/125).

See p718 for boat tours.

**SEA KAYAKING**

Island resorts and beachside accommodation places generally provide kayaks for guest use.



Bag 10, Neiafu; ☽ Jun-Dec), next door to Hakula Lodge, has been revealing some of Tonga's magic to kayaking adventurers on its camping and paddling expeditions around Vava'u (and Ha'apai) since 1991. This environmentally conscious company provides truly unique experiences (and supplies excellent equipment) on five-/nine-/eleven-day packages (with four/six/eight days of guided kayaking) for US\$900/1790/2130. Action-packed Adventure Week (US\$1570), falling between May and February, includes sea kayaking, whale watching, mountain biking and sailing or diving.

**WHALE WATCHING**

Vava'u has become one of the world's top whale-watching destinations, particularly due to the opportunity to swim with humpbacks. The activity is not without controversy (see p718), and **Whales Alive** (www.whalesalive.org.au) is an organisation devoted to the whales' protection.

Ecologically sensitive **Whale Discoveries** (☎ /fax 70173; VHF Channel 71; www.whalediscoveries.com; Private Bag 10, Neiafu) watches rather than swims with the whales, but provides snorkelling gear for use elsewhere on its day trips (US\$82 including lunch and drinks).

Diving operators (see p715) often fit whale watching between dives. At the time of writing, the uniform rate for whale watching (and swimming) was T\$150 with the following companies:

**Melinda Sea Adventures** (☎ 70975, 70861; VHF Channel 16; www.sailtonga.com) Combined sailing, snorkelling and whale watching (including lunch).

**Sailing Safaris** (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70650; VHF Channel 68; www.sailingsafaris.com; PO Box 153) On hydrophone-equipped *Whale Song*.

**Whale Watch Vava'u** (☎ 70747; VHF Channel 77; www.mounuisland.com) An enviable reputation and uncanny knack for finding whales.

**Whales in the Wild** (Map p713; ☎ 71381, 70872; VHF Channel 71; www.whales-in-the-wild.com) A friendly operation, run by Hakula Lodge (p719), with special family rates. Swimmers/nonswimmers T\$150/120.

**YACHT RACES**

On a balmy Friday afternoon you can't beat knocking back an Ikale or rum and watching a relaxed yacht race around the Port of Refuge. If you want to become 'rail meat' (crew), turn up to the Port of Refuge Yacht Club (at The Mermaid) when

On the waterfront at Fangafoa Marina, **Beluga Diving** (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70327; VHF Channel 16; www.belugadivingvavau.com) rents out single/double sea kayaks for US\$20/30 per day, while Adventure Backpackers (p719) has nonocean-going kayaks for T\$30.

**Friendly Islands Kayak Company** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70173; VHF Channel 71; www.fikco.com; Private



## WHALE ENCOUNTERS

Nothing compares to the experience of dangling midwater, staring into an azure abyss near a massive humpback whale. It might be a mother keeping a watchful eye and fin over its playful and curious calf or a lone singing male sending vibrating soundwaves through your chest. Some get very 'hippy' about it, with exclamations of, 'It changed my life...', 'It looked right into my eye...' or, 'It looked into my soul'. Others grow very quiet. Many men even shed tears. It's mesmerising, it's exhilarating, and to be honest, it's a bit scary too. Ask anyone who has been a bit too close to those graceful and smooth-looking fins: they have incredible force and their barnacle encrustations can cut like razors. Many visitors are content to marvel from the water's surface.

Tonga is an important breeding ground for humpback whales, which migrate to Tongan waters between June and November; it's one of the best places in the world to see these magnificent creatures. They can be seen bearing young in the calm reef-protected ocean, caring for new calves (conceived here 11 months earlier), and engaging in elaborate mating rituals.

Dubbed 'singing whales' because the males sing during courtship routines, the low notes of humpback 'songs' can reach 185 decibels and carry 100km through the open ocean. Humpbacks are also known for their dramatic antics in the water. They 'breach' (throw themselves completely out of the water), 'spyhop' (stand vertically upright above the water's surface), 'barrel roll' (splash the water with their long pectoral fins), and perform other remarkable acrobatic feats.

As Tonga's whale-watching industry has grown, so has concern over its possible impact. At the centre of the debate is the practice of swimming with whales, which some say disturbs the mothers and calves just when they are most vulnerable – and may force them to abandon the area before they are ready.

The Ministry of Fisheries has a useful, detailed leaflet, *Whale Watching in Tonga*, providing strict guidelines for whale-watching boats, planes and swimmers. Whale-watching operators should take their cue from the whales: if they seem disturbed and want to get away from the boat, then they should not be pursued.

Humpback populations around the world have declined rapidly over the past 200 years, from 150,000 in the early 1800s to an estimated 12,000 today. The same predictable migration habits that once made the giants easy prey for whalers nowadays make them easy finds for whale watchers.

the skippers meet at around 4pm between May and December. Spectators can watch from the bar at the 5pm race start. The only requirement for membership of the yacht club is arrival in Tonga on a yacht or launch (the MV 'Olovaha' doesn't count!).

## Tours

Vava'u's terrestrial attractions don't need expert knowledge to explore – a taxi or bicycle can do the job. Inquire at the TVB, or see the following for boat tours.

Several Neiafu fishing, diving, whale-watching and sailing operators run day boat excursions that typically include Swallows' and Mariner's Caves, picnicking on an uninhabited island and snorkelling at an off-shore reef, but they'll also cater to individual whims. The presence of humpback whales (June to November) is a special bonus.

Soki's Island Tours (contact the TVB) runs tailored boat tours (T\$50, minimum

three people) that can include snorkelling and fishing.

**Hakula** (☎ 70872, 71381; www.fishtonga.com) boat tours (T\$65, lunch T\$15), run by Hakula Lodge, explore Nuku Island, Swallows' and Mariner's Caves; snorkel the Japanese Gardens; and stop at Mala Island for lunch.

## Sleeping

There's a good range of accommodation around Neiafu and its causeway-connected islands (see also p722). Boat tour operators (see left) happily collect guests from the jetties and beaches of their accommodation around the Vava'u group of islands.

Bookings are advised between April and December.

Check the notice boards of Adventure Backpackers (opposite) and the Mermaid (opposite) for details on rentals – some with stunning water views. **Bayview Vacation Apartments** (Map p713; ☎ 70724; 1-bedroom apt

per week T\$400), just beyond the Vaipua Inlet causeway, has well-furnished, one-bedroom apartments with Mt Talou views and a good swimming area down the hill. Book through Adventure Backpackers.

## BUDGET

Bathrooms are shared unless otherwise noted at the following places.

**Port Wine Guest House** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70479; portwine@kalianet.to; Ha'amea Rd; s/d T\$15/25) Relax on the veranda or in the breezy lounge at this homely, four-room guesthouse after a hard day's adventure. Guests can use the well-stocked kitchen and fill water bottles from the tank. Showers are refreshingly cold. It's in a quiet spot, just a few minutes' stroll from the centre of town.

**Adventure Backpackers** (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70955; http://visitvavau.com/backpackers; Fatafehi Rd; dm T\$24, s/d from T\$48/78, d T\$88) This central, modern hostel makes a handy base to spring into Vava'u's myriad activities and nightlife. Fan-cooled rooms are bright, clean and secure (if a bit sterile), there's an excellent shared kitchen and communal area, and a sun-soaked terrace. Hot showers in winter only. Book ahead.

## MIDRANGE

**Hill Top Hotel** (Map pp716-17; ☎ /fax 70209; sunset@kalianet.to; Holopeka Hill; garden/harbour view d with bathroom from T\$75/115) Harbour-view rooms enjoy sublime views over the town, Port of Refuge and neighbouring islands. Each room is spacious, tiled and fan cooled and has good beds (but thin, scratchy sheets). Arm yourself with a torch and antidog missiles for the night-time walk up Holopeka Hill (meaning 'Place of Gathering Bats').

**Toula's Harbour View Motel** (Map p713; ☎ 70687; marcella@kalianet.to; s/d/tr incl breakfast T\$75/100/125) The old Marcella Resort is set in tropical gardens, with a tennis court, south of Neiafu. A tree forms the central strut of the nine detached cabins, each with a veranda and quality linen. Opening off the motel's guest lounge is a bar/restaurant (see Pierre's Table, p720) with a pleasant view of the Port of Refuge. Its Québécois owners speak English and French and provide a relaxed, family atmosphere. You can swim off the wharf below the resort, or walk (15 minutes) to a beach (see p721). Taxis from Neiafu cost T\$4.

**Puataukanave Motel** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 74000; puashotel@kalianetvav.to; Fatafehi Rd; s/d with fan T\$85/110, with air-con from T\$100/120, waterfront deluxe/superdeluxe d T\$170/205; ☎ ☎) Oddly furnished rooms seem to get more austere with size, but the 'superdeluxe' waterfront rooms have kitchens as well as balconies. Negotiate for budget rooms.

## TOP END

**Hakula Lodge** (Map p713; ☎ 70872; VHF 71; www.fishtonga.com; s/d/tr A\$150/175/210; ☎ ☎) The most attractive and atmospheric of Neiafu's accommodations, Hakula Lodge consists of two units opening onto a full-length veranda overlooking the Port of Refuge. Guests can head down the tropical garden path to swim off the private jetty, from where the owners' whale-watching (see p717) and fishing trips depart (see p715). It's 2km south of Neiafu.

**Paradise International Hotel** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70211; www.tongahost.com; Fatafehi Rd; island/garden/harbour view d US\$70/95/115; ☎ ☎) A sprawling place with heavy furniture and 'ma and pa' velour armchairs in tired but clean rooms. The best feature is the swimming pool (T\$5 for nonguests).

## Eating

Neiafu's dining options – Italian, Mexican, French, Swiss and pub-café-style mixed cuisine – are constantly expanding and you'll find lobster just about anywhere. Mala Island Resort (p722) accepts nonguests for meals and has a popular Sunday barbecue.

## CAFÉS & RESTAURANTS

**Café Tropicana** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71322; Fatafehi Rd; breakfast T\$4-16, meals T\$11-16; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Nab a table in the cool interior or slouch into a deckchair on the harbour-view terrace at this central café. Tasty options range from sandwiches (around T\$6) and burgers to Thai and Tongan dishes such as 'ota ika and otai (a rich, smoothie-like melange of tropical fruits and coconut cream). Pies, cookies and cakes line the front cabinet.

**Tongan Bob's** (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd; mains T\$16-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) A sand floor to sink your toes into and tasty Mexican staples to sink your teeth into. *Tostadas* (fried tortilla), enchiladas, tacos and burritos come packed with fresh pickings, or head straight

for the cinnamon and sugar-rolled banana *tostada* dessert. Cash only.

**Mermaid Restaurant** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70730; VHF Channel 16; breakfast & light meals T\$4-16, mains T\$25-36; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Yachties tie up tenders to the pontoon while others wind through a piratelike lair from Hala Lupe (Way of Doves) to the most popular spot in town. The extensive menu attracts plenty of repeat diners for bulging tortillas, juicy grills and the popular pizzas and seafood dishes. Saturday's barbecue includes fish and octopus.

**Ciao Italian Restaurant** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71030; Fatafehi Rd; pasta & pizza T\$10-18, mains T\$23-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) This provincial-style Italian bistro near the cathedral, serves authentic Italian cuisine, including pizza.

**Compass Rose** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71167; VHF 16; Fatafehi Rd; lunch T\$8-15, mains T\$18-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Perched on the edge of Hala Lupe, with elevated views over the Port of Refuge, this small restaurant offers relaxed elegance and good food.

**Dancing Rooster** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70886; Fatafehi Rd; mains T\$24-42; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Descend the stairs to the tropical garden overlooking the Port of Refuge and dine on dishes served with finesse from the Swiss chef. Portions are generous and options include rich local fish soup and lobster cooked any which way.

**Pierre's Table** (Map p713; ☎ 70687; Toula's Harbour View Resort, Toula; 5-course meals T\$27-68; ☎ dinner) Just out of Neiafu, Pierre's offers intimate dining on European-style dishes. Five-course meals start with lobster-topped hors d'oeuvres and finish with rich desserts and coffee. Main courses determine the meal price.

## TONGAN FEASTS

Joining in on a Tongan feast is the best way to experience Tongan food – much of which is cooked in an *'umu* – and get a good dose of traditional Tongan music and dance. Contact the TVB or your accommodation for current feasts. Expect to pay around T\$25 to T\$30 and take plenty of smaller denomination *pa'anga* with you for tips.

## SELF-CATERING

Neiafu's three supermarkets stock a reasonable range. **Puatakaunave Supermarket** (Map

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**La Paella** (Map p713; ☎ 16310; VHF Channel 10; dinner & entertainment T\$50) Tapana Island's La Paella restaurant gets rave reviews for its plentiful paella and lively entertainment. Get there if you can. Landlubbers can get a boat pick-up from 'Ano Beach; taxis from Neiafu cost T\$10.

pp716-17; ☎ 70644; Fatafehi Rd), affectionately known as 'Pua', has refrigerated chocolate as well as wine, beer and spirits.

The best place for fresh produce is **'Utukalongalu Market** (☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-midnight Fri, 7am-noon Sat), close to Halaevaalu Wharf.

The freshest fish (around T\$5 to T\$7 per kilogram) can be found at the **Vava'u Fish Market** (Map pp716-17; Halaevaalu Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon or 1pm Sat). For lobster (around T\$18 per kilogram), head to Ikapuna Store (see opposite) or **'Alatini Fisheries** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70939), which is behind the market but down the cliff from the main road. 'Alatini also sells imported gourmet goods and deli foods, wine and beer.

The **Royal Beer Shop** (Map pp716-17; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-11pm Mon-Thu & Sat, to 2am Fri) sells beer, wine, vodka, gin and rum.

On Sunday afternoon, just follow your nose through town to the bakeries – the places to be. Among them, **Tangitau & Sons Bakery** (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd) sells muffins and *keki* as well as basic bread and rolls. The **bakery** (Map pp716-17; cnr Ha'amea & Talau Rds; ☎ closed Sun) produces a continuous stream of excellent scrolls, cinnamon buns, chocolate and fruit muffins, and pull-apart savoury breads good enough for a meal.

## Drinking

**Mermaid** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70730; VHF Channel 16) The home of the Port of Refuge Yacht Club and the first port of call for many, yachtie or landlubber. The Mermaid is always casual but picks up its party cheer in the evening. Happy hour flows from 4pm to 6pm, while changing nightly entertainment includes darts competitions, quiz nights and Friday's yacht race, which is followed by live Tongan music and dancing. It's hats off unless you want to shout the bar.

**Tongan Bob's** (Map pp716-17; Kovana Rd; ☎ noon-late Mon-Fri) As laid back as a Mexican after siesta early in the evening, and festive as the night wears on. Nightly happenings include Monday's live Tongan string and ukulele band accompanied by a kava ceremony (kava T\$1; open to all), T\$1 tacos on Tuesday, and dancing when the tables are slid aside later in the week. Knock back an Ikale or margarita at happy hour (5pm to 7pm).

**Bounty Bar** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70576; Fatafehi Rd; ☎ Mon-Sat) A lively, very local place with karaoke on Tuesday night and live music.

The waterside decking at Puatakanave Restaurant (see Puatakanave Motel, p719) makes a good spot for afternoon drinks.

**Motele Nightclub** (Map pp716-17; Old Harbour; admission T\$3; ☎ Fri & Sat) When the town's bars call last drinks, this place, Neiafu's only nightclub, swells with the young and drunk. It's a bit rough; go in a group for more fun.

## Shopping

Stallholders in 'Utukalongalu Market sell shell- and woodcarvings, weavings and coconut-shell bras, and other handicraft can be found in shops along Fatafehi Rd.

A couple of studios print stylish, surf-quality T-shirts.

**Tropical Tease** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 71271; enter off Fatafehi Rd) Features local artwork in *kupesi* (tapa designs) and Vava'u 'dirt shirts', and has a small book exchange.

**Look Sharp Shop** (Map pp716-17; ☎ 70757; Fatafehi Rd) Opposite the Paradise International Hotel. Sells its signature kava-dyed range among others.

For fishing supplies head to the **Ikapuna Store** (☎ /fax 70174; VHF 69; Fatafehi Rd).

## AROUND VAVA'U

### Sia Ko Kafoa

Vava'u Island is nearly bisected by the Vaipua Inlet, which separates the Neiafu area from western Vava'u. The two sides of the island are connected by a causeway and a road climbs to the village of Taoa (meaning 'Spear') on the western shore. Behind Taoa are the twin hills of Lei'ulu, used as a burial ground, and to the left past Lei'ulu, Sia Ko Kafoa. On the summit is an *'esi*, a mound used as a rest area by chiefs and nobles and a place where young virgins were presented to amorous chiefs.

## 'Utula'aina Point

'Utula'aina Point, surrounded by steep cliffs above a turbulent sea in the island's north, provides perhaps the most spectacular views on Vava'u Island. To get there, head north from Holonga village until you see a track that forms a fork. Head straight ahead from the intersection. It curves around to the left a bit and emerges into a grassy open area after 10 or 15 minutes. Bear right through the bushes, climb the short grassy knoll and you'll emerge on 'Utula'aina Point. On exceptionally clear days the volcanic outliers of Toku and Fonualei are visible. Look out for whales between June and November. There's also a steep track leading to a secluded **beach** 50m before the trailhead.

## Makave

One of the most interesting beaches on Vava'u Island, Makave is easily accessed on foot from Neiafu along the shore of the Old Harbour. Walk past the entrance to Hala Tafangatoto and follow the shore east towards Makave village, the legendary home of a mysterious dark, giant people.

An hour's walk from Neiafu, on the beach below Makave village, you'll find an ancient **canoe mooring** beside an obtrusive rock and cave. Further east are the refreshing **freshwater springs** of Matalave.

## Eme'io & Keitahi Beaches

Seldom visited, these two beaches in the island's east are a dramatic, rugged alternative to the placid western waters. Eme'io Beach is well signposted all the way from Neiafu and has an idyllic, shaded grassy area. Though swimming conditions are not ideal, the pounding offshore surf, high cliffs and seclusion make up for it. Keitahi Beach is not as pristine, but the views are more dramatic and there are good swimming holes at low tide. To get there, turn left at an unmarked dirt road about 750m before Tu'aneikivale village.

## Toula & Veimumuni Cave

Near the southern point of Vava'u Island is Toula village. From Toula, turn left (east) following the path uphill past a cemetery. As you begin to descend to the beach, you'll see Veimumuni Cave in the bluff. Inside it are an appealing freshwater spring and swimming hole.

## Pangaimotu & 'Utungake

'Ano and Hinakauea Beaches (Map p713), near the southern end of Pangaimotu, are beautiful and very quiet, with sheltered turquoise water, abundant vegetation, good snorkelling and a safe anchorage.

The long, thin island of 'Utungake is connected by a causeway to Pangaimotu, and the pleasant Talihau Beach is near its southern tip.

Overlooking the water in a quiet village at the tip of 'Utungake, **Lucky's Beach Houses** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 71075; luckysbeach@yahoo.com; Talihau; tent site for 2 T\$25, s/d fale incl breakfast T\$35/60, beach house T\$60/80, extra person T\$25) has a king-sized bed downstairs and a day bed upstairs. Rustic romantics will love the traditional thatched *fale*, with shuttered windows onto the beach, mosquito nets and hurricane lamp lighting. The tent site includes a tent and sparkling bathroom facilities. Guests can launch a kayak off the beach to explore the islands and paddle over to nearby Mala. Dinner is available (from T\$20).

Primarily aimed at the baby-boomer market on prebooked packages, three-star **Tongan Beach Resort** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70380; VHF Channel 71; www.thetongan.com; high season d & tw US\$160, extra bed US\$50; half/full board US\$48/60) on Hikutamole Beach, 'Utungake, has standard rooms, a lovely sand-floor *fale* bar and a restaurant. Bring reef shoes. Children under 10 stay for free and pay 50% for meals.

## SOUTHERN VAVA'U ISLANDS

### Mala

Just south of 'Utungake, the small island of Mala has a sandy swimming beach and a welcoming resort. The **Japanese Gardens** is a beautiful snorkelling spot between Mala and Kapa, though a strong current flows between these two islands and 'Utungake. Beware of a legendary cannibal god who reputedly lives on Mala and is said to capture and devour passing boaters.

Plenty of yachties file into the broad restaurant (open to nonguests; breakfast and dinner T\$55) and join guests for sundowners (happy hour 4pm to 7pm) at **Mala Island Resort** (Map p713; ☎ 71304; VHF Channel 16; mala@kalianet.to; dm T\$50, s/d bungalow T\$125/150; 📶). Mala is an upbeat, welcoming place where some wild stories get exchanged (just reach for the occasional grain of salt!). The tapalined bungalows have creaky wooden floors,

beautiful views and plenty of charm, though remodelling is planned in the near future. There's dinner and dancing on Friday, a Tongan feast on Saturday, and a Sunday barbecue. Transfers from the airport and town cost T\$25 per person and the resort's boat can meet you at Talihau Beach. Low-season rates available.

## Hunga & Fofoa

A large, sheltered lagoon formed by Hunga, Kalau and Fofoa offers excellent anchorage and impressive **snorkelling**.

**Ika Lahi Lodge** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70611; www.tongafishing.com; PO Box 24; tw/tr/q NZ\$280/285/295, full board US\$60) is a fishing-focused resort (*ika lahi* means 'big fish, many fish'). It's handily close to the deep ocean, has four guest units with balconies and plenty of interest for nonfishing partners.

## Foe'ata & Foelifuka

The island of Foe'ata, immediately south of Hunga, offers glorious **white beaches** (sometimes diminished by tides) and good **snorkelling**. There is an anchorage on the north side of Foelifuka, beside Foe'ata.

The ecolodge-cum-eccentric dream **Blue Lagoon** (Map p713; ☎ /fax 70247; VHF Channel 16; www.foiata-island.com; standard fale d T\$160, superior fale for up to 4 people T\$280, half/full board T\$90/100) enjoys an idyllic beach position on Foe'ata. Each of the six large *fale* is uniquely constructed in its immediate environment from local materials and the food is some of Vava'u's best. (The language can be some of Vava'u's most colourful.) Transfers cost T\$130.

## Nuapapu

Nuapapu is best known for **Mariner's Cave** (Map p713), a hidden cave at its northern end. An interesting phenomenon of this cave, caused by the swelling sea, is the fog that forms every few seconds, only to disappear again just as fast. The main entrance is a couple of metres below the surface and the tunnel is about 4m long; use the well to pull you towards it, then exit when the swell pushes you out. Snorkelling gear is recommended.

## Vaka'eitu

The small, hilly island of Vaka'eitu has secluded beaches on each side, a secure overnight anchorage and some of Vava'u's best

snorkelling in the nearby **coral gardens**. Check with the TVB for details about the island's Popao Village Resort (Map p713), which has stunning views over the islands from its hill-top position (a bit of a walk up from the beach).

## Kapa

Kapa Island's main attraction, **Swallows' Cave** ('Anapekepeka; Map p713), cuts into a cliff on the west side of the island. It's actually inhabited by hundreds of swiftlets, and the exceptional underwater visibility makes it great for snorkelling. The water is crystal clear despite the floor of the cave being 18m below the surface, and the only access is by boat (unless you want to abseil in; see p715).

## Nuku

A magical white-sand spit runs off the tiny, uninhabited island of Nuku, into gradients of turquoise and azure water. It's a favoured spot for numerous official functions, celebrations and private parties. Locals often paddle over from Kapa to collect a small fee from anyone who stops here. Watch the current at the western tip of the island.

## Taunga, Ngau & Pau

Just south of Kapa, the inviting and sporadically inhabited islands of Ngau and Taunga have idyllic beaches with fine snorkelling and four good anchorages. At low tide, Ngau and Taunga are connected by a fine sandy beach. Ngau is in turn connected to the uninhabited island of Pau by a slender ribbon of sand that is exposed except at the turn of high tide. There's a superb anchorage in the bight of Ngau on the eastern shore.

## 'Eue'iki & 'Euakafa

The raised island of 'Eue'iki has easy boat access to the stunning white beach, and a coral garden off the southern shore. You can circumnavigate the island in around 45 minutes at low tide, and explore the caves on the far side of the island from Treasure Island Resort.

A sandy beach rings the north side of relatively small, uninhabited 'Euakafa. From its eastern end a trail leads through the forest and mango trees to the summit (100m), containing the overgrown tomb of Talafaiva.

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Treasure Island Resort** (☎ 12935; www.treasureislandvavau.com; d fale T\$150, full board T\$90) In a magical setting on the north side of 'Eua'iki, this resort's thatched bar/restaurant perches on a white, coral-free sandy beach. Solid *fale* with water-view balconies are spaced along the beachfront and feature firm beds, private bathrooms (check if hot water is now available), clam-shell soap holders and hibiscus flower adornments. Two family *fale* also have bunk beds. Guests can use the kayaks to explore nearby 'Euakafa. The European cuisine served at the restaurant generally features fish (the day's catch) or meat, and may be available to yachties if booked ahead. Return boat transfers cost T\$60. Bring your own snorkelling gear.

## Mounu & 'Ovalau

A short distance southeast of Vaka'eitu are Mounu and 'Ovalau, two more of the perfect islands Vava'u has in abundance.

Vava'u's most elegant accommodation for those wanting privacy and their own space for contemplation is **Mounu Island Resort** (☎ 70747; VHF Channel 77; www.mounuisland.com; d fale US\$175, honeymoon fale US\$200; full board US\$70). It consists of only a few ecofriendly wooden *fale*. Pass through a humpback whale's jaw bones to the breezy restaurant and well-stocked bar. Island-to-airport transfers cost US\$60 and excellent whale-watching tours are run by the owners. Three nights minimum; no children under 12.

## EASTERN VAVA'U ISLANDS

Vava'u's eastern islands are better reached from Neiafu's Old Harbour.

## 'Ofu, Kenutu & Lolo

'Ofu is a friendly island and well worth a day's exploration. Its surrounding waters are the primary habitat of the prized but endangered *'ofu* shell – buying them will only encourage their collection.

The small, uninhabited island of Kenutu, just east of 'Ofu, has superb beaches, and coral patches south of the island offer good snorkelling and diving. There's an anchorage on the western side. The reef between Kenutu and Lolo islands, immediately south, is very dramatic.

## THE NIUAS

The closest most people will ever get to the remote Niuas (meaning 'Rich in Coconuts'), in Tonga's extreme northern reaches, is picking up a first-day cover of Niuafu'ou's decorative postage stamps.

Tongan tradition remains very much alive on these three small volcanic islands and dress standards are very conservative.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

**Airlines Tonga Air Fiji** (Airlines Tonga; ☎ 23690; www.airlinestonga.com) services Niuatoputapu and Niuafu'ou once a week, but flights are prone to change and cancellation. One-way fares are T\$250 from Tongatapu via Vava'u, or T\$129 from Vava'u.

##### Boat

The MV *'Olovaha* is supposed to make a return trip from Vava'u to Niuatoputapu and Niuafu'ou, then back to Vava'u once a month, but the unpredictable schedule is reliant on the weather and government subsidies. Inquire at the TVB in Tongatapu. Fares from Tongatapu/Vava'u to the Niuas are T\$81/48, and Niuatoputapu to Niuafu'ou is T\$36. Due to its volcanic nature, Niuafu'ou lacks a decent anchorage or landing site, leaving access reliant on the mercy of the wind and waves.

Most visitors to Niuatoputapu arrive on private yachts. There is only one marker and two range sites (which are inaccurate by about 5m) at the port. If you get the range sites to line up you'll run aground!

### NIUATOPUTAPU

pop 1400 / area 18 sq km

Niuatoputapu (Very Sacred Coconut) has a squashed sombrero shape made up of a steep and narrow central ridge 130m high and surrounding coastal plains. Much of this is plantation land, with many archaeological sites hidden in the undergrowth.

The north coast is bounded by a series of reefs, but there is a passage through to Falehau Wharf; yachts anchor just northwest of here.

Most of the island's interesting sights can be covered in two days.

### Information

Sleepy Hihifo is the Niuas 'capital' and home to a police station, post office and small store. Cash and travellers cheques can be changed at the Treasury, though they sometimes run out of cash so it's advisable to bring *pa'anga* from Tongatapu.

### Sights & Activities

The island is surrounded by magnificent white beaches of remarkable diversity and is easily circumnavigated in seven to eight hours (11km return trip).

**Boat trips**, including to the nearby Bali Hai-like volcanic island of Tafahi (reputed to produce the best kava in the kingdom), can be arranged with local fisherman for around T\$30 per hour. There's good **diving** outside the reef, but no diving equipment is available on the island.

### NIUTOUA SPRING

The cool, sparkling pool of Niutoua Spring flows through a crack in the rock just west of Hihifo. It's full of fish and great for a swim. If you intend to bathe at Niutoua, bear in mind that the spectacle of *palangi* will quickly draw an audience. Swim in baggy clothes with a minimum of exposed skin.

### BEACHES & SWIMMING

The most beautiful beaches are on the northwest side of the main island and on **Hunganga**, the offshore islet, especially bordering the channel between the two. The reef is close in.

### WESTERN WATERWAYS

Near Hihifo, a maze of shallow waterways wind between the islets of Nukuseilala, Tafuna, Tavili and Hunganga. At low tide, you can walk anywhere in the area by wading through a few centimetres of water. At high tide, the passages (especially between Niuatoputapu and Hunganga) are excellent for swimming.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Palm Tree Island Resort** (☎ 85090; palmtreeislandtonga@yahoo.it; s/d T\$180/220, half/full board T\$35/50) The wood-trimmed beachfront *fale* on Hunganga provide a comfortable base for exploration or navel gazing. Meals feature lots of fresh fish and organic fruit and vegetables.

There's a dinghy shuttle to Hihifo or you can walk across at low tide. Snorkelling, fishing and walking trips can be arranged.

**Kaloline Guesthouse** (☎ 85021; s/d T\$20/25) Warm hospitality awaits in this Hihifo village home with a spacious lounge and mosquito nets over chintzy bed covers in neat rooms. Guests can use the kitchen or book meals in advance.

Excellent camp sites are on the west of Hihifo and the beach along the island's south coast, though you need to get permission first.

Bring your own food to the island as only limited groceries are available.

### NIUAFU'OU

pop 735 / area 50.3 sq km

Remote Niuafu'ou resembles a doughnut floating in the sea, its water-filled caldera encircled by barren and impassable lava flows. During the past 150 years, Niuafu'ou has experienced 10 major volcanic eruptions, though there hasn't been any major activity since 1946. Niouafu'ou has no coral reef and no sandy beaches, just open ocean surrounds. Also known as 'Tin Can Island' due to a previous method of mail delivery, Niuafu'ou has a notably different dialect from Tonga's other islands (it's closer to Samoa), and its fiercely loyal residents have a reputation for toughness.

### Information

Boil all lake water before drinking; locals are generally happy to fill your water bottles from their rainwater tanks when asked.

Money can be changed at the Treasury.

### Sights & Activities

A track (taking approximately six hours) leads right around the doughnut-shaped volcanic cone and its splendid freshwater lake, **Vai Lahi** (Big Lake), which nearly fills the island's large and mysterious crater. Along the southern and western shores is a vast, barren moonscape of **lava flows**. On the northern shore, mounds of volcanic slag, lava tubes, vents and craters are accessible from the main road. Beneath this flow is the buried village of **'Angaha**.

Keep an eye out for Niuafu'ou's most unusual inhabitants: the **megapode birds**, which use the warm volcanic soil to incubate their eggs (see p558).

### Sleeping

There are numerous excellent camp sites on the crater (especially on the lake shores), although camping will draw a lot of attention and curiosity. A handful of village houses offer guestrooms; contact the TVB in Tongatapu for details. Expect solar-powered lighting, communal cold showers and no refrigeration. Some travellers have stayed at (and have given good reports about) the Catholic Mission.

It's wise to bring all your food with you.

## TONGA DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

#### Camping

Camping is generally discouraged in Tonga, and is illegal in Ha'apai and Vava'u unless it's part of a guided trip. But camping trips to uninhabited islands in Ha'apai (including volcanic Tofua) and Vava'u are easily arranged and thoroughly recommended. A few places to stay allow camping.

#### Guesthouses

In Tongatapu and Vava'u it is easy to find clean, well-run guesthouses, many of which will have cooking facilities. In Ha'apai, cooking facilities are the norm, but the room standard is on the whole a lot lower. Generally, expect cold showers. The average budget price is between T\$20 to T\$30 for a bed, a little more for a private bathroom.

#### Hotels & Resorts

'Resort' is a loose term in Tonga and although there are no chain resorts, travellers who don't require organised fun will find boutique-style accommodation with plenty of comforts in Tongatapu and its nearby islands, on Foa in Ha'apai and throughout Vava'u group. Many of these are quite eclectic, with an eco bent.

### ACTIVITIES

Tongatapu's western waters offer world-class surfing, while surfers can access breaks by boat in Vava'u. Kayaking trips around Vava'u and Ha'apai rate among the top adventure activities in the world, with a mix of reefs, beaches, whales, uninhabited islands and cultural interactions in small villages.

## PRACTICALITIES

- The weekly *Tonga Chronicle* is the official newspaper of the Tongan government and runs a couple of articles in English. The only English-language newspaper for sale is the *New Zealander*, a weekly published in Australia for New Zealanders.
- Tune into English programming on **Radio New Zealand International** (www.rnzi.com) at 15720kHz, 9885kHz, 9870kHz and 17675kHz; **Radio Australia** (www.abc.net.au/ra), with shortwave frequencies including 5995kHz, 12080kHz, 15515kHz, broadcast at Nuku'alofa 103FM and 101.7FM; and **BBC World Service** (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice), no direct service – refer to the East Asia schedule online. See each website for details on shortwave and satellite radio frequencies and listening via the Internet. Satellite TV is increasingly available in Tonga, while local TV is heavily religious.
- Tonga has both the PAL system (Australasia and most of Western Europe) and the NTSC system (North America and Japan).
- Power in Tonga is 240V AC, 50Hz. Three-pronged plugs used in NZ and Australia are OK here.
- Tonga uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

## Caving

'Eua has the most dramatic caves in Tonga and plenty of sinkholes to delve into and emerge from on the roots of giant banyan trees. A visit to water-accessible caves is requisite on Vava'u, while the freshwater pool in 'Anahulu Cave on Tongatapu is a popular swimming spot.

## Cycling

Flat terrain and generally slow driving make Tongatapu and Lifuka (Ha'apai) ideal places for cycling. Bicycles can be hired on Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai and Vava'u.

## Diving & Snorkelling

Great visibility, comfortable water temperatures and sheltered waters create magnificent conditions for diving and snorkelling. Professional dive outfits operate out of Vava'u, Ha'apai and Tongatapu (including 'Eua). See p74 for a spotlight on some of Tonga's dive sites.

## Hiking

'Eua's national park and plantation forest provide a varied terrain with some of the South Pacific's best hiking (and no snakes or poisonous spiders). Other good hiking venues include the Niuas, Kao and volcanic Tofua in Ha'apai, and various islands in the Vava'u group.

## Sailing & Fishing

Vava'u has some of the best game fishing in the Pacific. The group's idyllic, sheltered islands make a stunning yachting destination (May and November are the most popular sailing times), with various yacht charter options. Tongatapu also has a handful of professional fishing charters.

## Whale Watching

Due to the incredible opportunity to swim with humpback whales in Tonga, the kingdom is one the world's top whale-watching destinations between June and November, when whales come to mate and bear their young. Vava'u is the main centre for whale watching, but there are also operators in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua. See p118 for more information.

## BOOKS

*Tonga Islands: William Mariner's Account* by Dr John Martin (see the boxed text, p708 for more on William Mariner) and *Tales of the Tikongs* by Epeli Hau'ofa should be mandatory companion reading for anyone visiting Tonga. The former provides a fascinating historical background on many sights throughout the islands, while the latter is a collection of wry, satirical vignettes on life in 'Tiko' which gives the visitor an insight into the modern Tongan way of life.

*Friendly Isles: A Tale of Tonga; 'Utulei, My Tongan Home; and The Tongan Past*, by Vava'u resident Patricia Ledyard Matheson, all relate anecdotes of Tongan life.

*Queen Salote of Tonga*, written by Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, is a warm account of the queen's life.

*Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern* by Ian Campbell provides a very readable history of Tonga. With a clever play on the title, *Island Kingdom Strikes Back*, by Kalafi Moala, covers the more recent history (corruption, skulduggery and illegal arrest) in the kingdom.

Lonely Planet's *Samoa & Tonga* provides a lot more detail on Tonga.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are flexible, but usually run from 9am until 4.30pm, with most shops open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday (some close for an hour at lunch), and 9am to noon on Saturday.

Café-style eateries open early and restaurants are typically open from lunchtime until around 10.30pm, but those that double as bars can stay open until as late as 2am. Everything closes at midnight on Saturday and only those restaurants/bars that have accommodation are officially allowed to open on Sunday, though there are exceptions.

See p728 for public holidays that will affect opening hours

## CHILDREN

Tonga is a great place to travel with children and there's plenty to keep them happy: swimming, snorkelling, beachcombing, cycling, kayaking, short boat trips, and visits to interesting sights and cultural events (especially Tongan feasts).

Accommodation with a beach or swimming pool may be all the entertainment you need. Some hotels allow children to stay free of charge, others have a reduced children's rate, and a few do not accept children at all. Inquire whether your accommodation can arrange baby-sitting, if required, as the small size and island location of some may make this difficult.

The larger supermarkets in Nuku'alofa and Neiafu are well stocked, and disposable nappies (diapers) and UHT and powdered milk are widely available, but sunscreen and insect repellent can be hard to find out of Nuku'alofa.

It's worth picking up some children's snorkelling gear before arriving in Tonga.

You'll need to bring your own child car seat and check that it clips into seatbelts.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tonga is a safe country to visit. There has been a rise in thefts in recent years, though these rarely occur against the person. Any attacks on *palangi* usually go hand in hand with late nights and alcohol. Brawls are common in bars – keep tuned for trouble.

There are a lot of dogs roaming around Tonga: most are either friendly or will keep their distance, but a few (especially when they're in packs) are aggressive. Pretending to throw a stone often discourages them.

In Nuku'alofa, cases of taxi drivers taking new arrivals to the wrong guesthouses are becoming regular, so make sure you get dropped where you asked to be dropped.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Tongan Embassies & Consulates

Tonga has diplomatic representatives in the following countries:

**UK** (☎ 020-7724 5828; fax 020-7723 9074; 36 Molyneux St, London W1H 6AB)

**USA** California (☎ 415-781 0365; www.tongaconsulate.us; 360 Post St, Suite 604, San Francisco, CA 94108); Hawai'i (☎ 808-953 2449; fax 808-955 1447; Suite 306B, 738 Kaheka St, Honolulu, HI 96814)

### Embassies & Consulates in Tonga

The following foreign diplomatic representatives are found in Nuku'alofa:

**Australia** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23244; www.embassy.gov.au/to.html; Salote Rd) High Commission.

**Canada** Limited consular services available at the Australian High Commission.

**China** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24554; fax 24596; Vuna Rd) Embassy.

**EU** (☎ 23820; eutonga@kalianet.net; Taufa'ahau Rd) European Commission.

**Germany** (☎ 23477; fax 23154; Taufa'ahau Rd) Honorary Consulate.

**NZ** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23122; nzchnuk@kalianet.net; Taufa'ahau Rd) High Commission.

**UK** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 24395; fax 24109; Vuna Rd) High Commission.

**USA** (Peace Corps ☎ 25466, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 23600; National Reserve Bank)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tongan families need little excuse for a feast, and each island group has an annual festival featuring music and dance.

The biggest is Tongatapu's week-long **Heilala Festival**, held in July. It celebrates King Taufa'ahau's birthday with parades, dance and sporting competitions, arts and music. The **Miss Galaxy Pageant**, also held in Nuku'alofa in July, is the flamboyant and fun international *fakaleiti* (see the boxed text, p690) competition, and is always sold out.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

As in most of Polynesia, homosexuality is an accepted fact of life in Tonga and you'll see plenty of gay men around, including those following the fine old Polynesian tradition of *fakaleiti* (see the boxed text, p690). Whatever lesbian population exists is much more under cover. Public displays of sexual affection are frowned upon, whether gay or straight.

## HOLIDAYS

In addition to New Year's Day, Easter, Anzac Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day (see p829 for dates), public holidays in Tonga include the following:

**Prince Tupouto'a's Birthday** 4 May

**Emancipation Day** 4 June

**King Taufa'ahau's Birthday** 4 July

**Constitution Day** 4 November

**King George I's Birthday** 4 December

## INTERNET ACCESS

Several Internet cafés in Nuku'alofa charge around T\$2 per hour. Access is generally limited to the main islands in other island groups, where high schools offer the best-value access at around T\$5 to T\$8 per hour (and the only access on 'Eua and Niutopotapu). Other operators charge T\$12 per hour in Vava'u and Ha'apai.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

The website of the **Tonga Visitors Bureau** ([www.tongaholiday.com](http://www.tongaholiday.com)) is a good starting point for travel information. **Matangi Tonga** ([www.matangitonga.to](http://www.matangitonga.to)) is like an online newspaper and has the best coverage of Tongan news and issues.

## MONEY

Tonga is one of the least expensive Pacific destinations. Without including inter-island transport, strict budgeters could get by on T\$35 a day. Based on twin-share accommodation, midrange travellers enjoying a few

activities should budget on around T\$110 a day each, while top-end travellers would need a daily minimum of around T\$240.

## Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted at many tourist facilities, with Visa and MasterCard the most common but these attract a 4% to 5% fee on transactions. There are ATMs with Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus facilities in Tongatapu and Vava'u. Western Union has offices throughout Tonga, and MoneyGram is represented by the Westpac Bank of Tonga.

## Currency

Notes come in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 *pa'anga* (T\$). Coins come in denominations of one, five, 10, 20 and 50 *seniti*.

Country	Unit	Pa'anga
Australia	A\$1	T\$1.52
Canada	C\$1	T\$1.80
CFP zone	100 CFP	T\$2.12
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	T\$3.89
euro zone	€1	T\$2.53
Fiji	F\$1	T\$1.16
Japan	¥100	T\$1.80
NZ	NZ\$1	T\$1.28
Samoa	ST1	70 <i>seniti</i>
Solomon Islands	S\$1	28 <i>seniti</i>
UK	£1	T\$3.67
USA	US\$1	T\$2.01
Vanuatu	100Vt	T\$1.84

## Moneychangers

Australian US, NZ and Fijian dollars plus British sterling are most easily exchanged in Tonga, but yen and euro are also widely accepted. Travellers cheques receive the best exchange, with a transaction fee of only 10 *seniti* per cheque, and all major brands are accepted.

## TELEPHONE

Mobile-phone users can get simcards in Tongatapu through **UCall** (☎ 0800 222; [www.tcc.to/ucall\\_main.htm](http://www.tcc.to/ucall_main.htm); simcard T\$45 incl T\$10 credit, minimum recharge T\$10) or **Tonfón** (☎ 875 1000; [www.tonfon.to](http://www.tonfon.to); simcard T\$10 incl T\$5 credit, minimum recharge T\$5). UCall's service is more reliable. Mobiles need to be GSM 900 compatible and must be unlocked from your local operator.

## HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of coffee:** T\$2.60
- **Drinking coconut:** T\$1
- **Bicycle hire:** T\$8 to T\$15
- **Lobster meal:** T\$26 to T\$36
- **Whale-watching trip:** T\$120

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L unleaded petrol:** T\$1.80 to T\$2.30
- **1.5L bottled water:** T\$1
- **355mL bottle of Ikalé beer:** T\$3.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** T\$17 to T\$22
- **Sipi (mutton) curry:** T\$3.50

Tonga's international telephone code is ☎ 676. There are no local area codes.

Tonga's emergency phone number is ☎ 911. The international operator is ☎ 913. Directory enquiry is ☎ 910.

## TIME

Along with the Chukotka Peninsula in far eastern Russia, Tonga is the first place to see a new day. Due to an odd kink in the International Date Line, Tonga is actually 20 minutes east of the 180th meridian, placing it 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Noon in Tonga is 3pm the previous day in Los Angeles, 11pm the previous day in London and 9am the same day in Sydney. In the Samoas, directly north of Tonga, the time would be noon the previous day! When NZ is on summer daylight saving time, Tonga and NZ share the same time; the rest of the year NZ is one hour behind.

## TOURIST INFORMATION IN TONGA

The **Tonga visitors bureau** (TVB; ☎ 25334; [www.tongaholiday.com](http://www.tongaholiday.com)) has offices in Nuku'alofa, Ha'apai and Vava'u.

## VISAS

Most country's citizens are granted a 31-day visitors visa on arrival upon presentation of a passport with at least six month's validity and an onward ticket. Those intending to fly in and depart Tongan waters by yacht require a letter of authority from one of

Tonga's diplomatic missions overseas or the Immigration Division.

One-month visa extensions are granted at the Immigration Departments in Nuku'alofa, Ha'apai and Vava'u for stays up to six months. You'll need one passport photo for each extension (T\$46) and a photocopy of your onward ticket.

# TRANSPORT IN TONGA

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

From Fiji, Samoa, Los Angeles, Australia and NZ, access to Tonga is straightforward. Auckland (NZ) and Nadi/Suva (Fiji) are the most convenient connecting points. For overseas contact details for airlines, see p835. Flights are often full between December and February. Everyday fares are listed here but in reality can be almost 50% cheaper. The major carriers:

**Air New Zealand** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23192; [www.airnewzealand.com](http://www.airnewzealand.com); Tongi Arcade, Taufa'ahau Rd)

**Air Pacific** (Map pp696-7; ☎ 23422; [www.airpacific.com](http://www.airpacific.com); nr Taufa'ahau & Wellington Rds)

**Pacific Blue** ([www.flypacificblue.com](http://www.flypacificblue.com))

**Polynesian Airlines** (☎ 24566; [www.polynesianairlines.com](http://www.polynesianairlines.com))

### ASIA

Air Pacific operates direct flights from Tokyo to Nadi (Fiji), which connect with flights to Tonga (Nuku'alofa). Air New Zealand has flights from Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Singapore and Hong Kong to Auckland, with onward flights to the Tonga. Most flights from other parts of Asia are routed through Auckland and Nadi.

### AUSTRALIA & NZ

Air New Zealand, Polynesian Airlines and Pacific Blue operate flights between Auckland and Tonga for around NZ\$450 one way, though often considerably cheaper.

From Australia, Pacific Blue has two weekly flights between Tonga and Sydney (from A\$550 one way), with connections to other Australian cities. Polynesian has

## DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax is T\$25, payable at the airport.

one direct flight per week between Sydney and Tonga (from A\$650), but you have to return via Auckland.

Air New Zealand has daily flights from Australia to Auckland (from \$550 one way), with connections (often requiring stopovers of around five hours) to Tonga seven times per week.

Air Pacific flights from Brisbane and Sydney to Nadi (Fiji) connect with flights to Tonga.

Travellers should also be aware that ever-increasing code-share agreements mean that it should be easy to arrange through-ticketing from destinations across Australia.

### CANADA & USA

Los Angeles and Honolulu are the two major gateway cities for travel between the USA (and Canada) and the South Pacific. The following are low-season fares.

From Los Angeles you can fly to Tonga once a week via Honolulu and Apia (Samoa) on Polynesian (from US\$1300 return), or once a week on Air New Zealand via Auckland (from US\$1050 return). The fastest way into the southwest Pacific is to take the Air Pacific (code sharing with Qantas) or Air New Zealand flights direct from Los Angeles to Nadi (both fly three times weekly) then connect to Nuku'alofa.

Return flights from Vancouver, Canada, to Nuku'alofa cost from C\$2500.

Air New Zealand offers direct flights from Los Angeles to Nuku'alofa (from US\$650 one way).

### EUROPE

Europeans usually fly to the South Pacific via Los Angeles, Sydney or Auckland, then direct (or via Fiji) to Nuku'alofa. Air New Zealand has attractive fares from London or Frankfurt to Los Angeles, with connections from Los Angeles to the rest of the South Pacific. Air New Zealand's return fares to Tonga, via Los Angeles and Auckland, start from UK£1100. It also has London to Auckland flights via Singapore and Hong Kong.

### PACIFIC

Nadi (Fiji) and Auckland (NZ) are the region's two major air transport hubs. Nadi is a 1¼-hour hop from Tonga, and Auckland is a 2½-hour flight.

Air Pacific flies between Nuku'alofa and Nadi twice a week.

Polynesian Airlines has three weekly flights between Apia (Samoa) and Nuku'alofa/Vava'u via Pago Pago (from ST670/450, one way). Air New Zealand flies between Nuku'alofa and Apia once a week.

Various air passes connect Tonga with the other Pacific islands. See p837 for more on air passes.

### Sea

Most yachts come to Tonga on the westerly trade winds from the Samoan Islands. Ports of entry for yachts are Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu), Neiafu (Vava'u), Pangai, Lifuka (Ha'apai), Falehau (Niuatoputapu) and Futu (Niuafu'ou).

There's a charge for anchoring anywhere in Tongan waters, calculated by multiplying T\$1.80 by gross tonnage of the yacht. In Nuku'alofa, this is payable upon departure at the **Ports Authority** (☎ 23168; marports@kalianet.to; Queen Salote Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). Pay the harbour dues and then head to Customs with the receipt.

In Nuku'alofa, Customs is based in the **One Stop Shop** (☎ 23967; Queen Salote Wharf; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). The customs clearance fee in Tonga is T\$50 (an extra T\$5 if outside working hours). In Vava'u, pull up at the southern end of Neiafu Wharf and contact the **boarding officers** (☎ 70053; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri). In Ha'apai, check in with the customs officer inside the passenger shelter on Taufā'ahau Wharf upon arrival.

To summon the harbour master and for emergencies in Tonga use VHF Channel 16 or, if you're in VHF range of Vava'u, contact the charter yacht company the Moorings (VHF Channel 72).

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

Flying is by far the easiest and fastest way to get around Tonga. There are no flights on Sunday and schedules are subject to change at short notice. It's important to tell the airline in advance if you have a connecting international flight so that you get your 20kg baggage allowance and don't get bumped off the flight (which often happens).

Tonga's two domestic services are operated by **Peau Vava'u** (www.peauvavau.to) and

**Airlines Tonga Air Fiji** (www.airlinestonga.com). Direct return flights between Tongatapu and Vava'u (adult/child from T\$210/155), and Tongatapu and Ha'apai (from T\$155/125), operate at least once daily. Ha'apai and Vava'u (from T\$100/70) are connected three times a week.

### Boat

#### INTER-ISLAND FERRY

Several passenger freighters travel between the main island groups and trips range from almost pleasurable cruising with sightseeing and whale watching (in season) en route, to barfing hell-rides kept afloat with plenty of midnight prayers. In either event, consider it a cultural experience. The TVB website (www.tongaholidays.com) lists ferry schedules (prone to delay and alteration), which must be rechecked prior to intended travel. Economy (deck class) fares are listed here (children aged under 12 pay about 50%).

The main carrier is the MV 'Olovaha, run by the **Shipping Corporation of Polynesia** (☎ 23853; scp@tonfon.to; Queen Salote Wharf, Nuku'alofa). It does weekly runs from Tongatapu (Nuku'alofa) to Ha'apai (Lifuka and Ha'afeva, T\$37, 11½ hours) and Vava'u (Neiafu, T\$55, 22 hours). Every couple of months it goes to the Niua (T\$81 from Tongatapu), but it is rarely able to land at Niuafo'ou.

The MV **Pulupaki**, run by **Uata Shipping Line** (Walter Line; ☎ 23855; uataline@kalianet.to; Queen Salote Wharf, Nuku'alofa), is a lot quicker (Ha'apai, T\$45; Vava'u, T\$60), but offers only deck-class travel.

The Church of Tonga's **MV Siu Pele** (contact Tiukala ☎ 25555; one-way fare T\$42) departs Nuku'alofa's Domestic Wharf at 9pm Monday for Pangia (in the Ha'apai Group) via Nomuka, Ha'afeva and 'Uiha, returning from 'Uiha some time on Thursday.

There are services daily (except Sunday) between Tongatapu and 'Eua on **MV Ikale** (Walter Line; ☎ 23855) or **MV 'Otu Tonga** (Tofa Shipping; ☎ 21326; 'Unga Rd). Boats depart Nuku'alofa's Tuimatamoana Harbour at 12.30pm for the 1½- to 2½-hour crossing, returning from 'Eua's Nafanua Wharf around 5am the next morning. The generally simple crossing can get rough. One-

way fares cost T\$20; tickets are sold on board.

### OTHER VESSELS

Smaller islands off the main ferry routes can be reached by smaller boats in all island groups.

### Car

Hire cars are available on Tongatapu and Vava'u. Hiring a car or van with a driver is another option; this can be done on both of these islands, and on 'Eua. You must organise a Tongan driving licence from the police, for which your only test will be to simultaneously produce your home driving licence, your passport and T\$17 cash.

People drive very slowly in Tonga. The speed limit is 40km/h in villages and 65km/h elsewhere and, except for a few budding organ donors on Tongatapu, it is faithfully observed.

### Local Transport

#### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Minibuses and taxis meet incoming flights on Tongatapu and Vava'u, and taxis meet flights in Ha'apai. Many places to stay will organise airport transfers for guests.

### BUS

Local buses run on Tongatapu, and in a more limited capacity on Vava'u and its causeway-linked islands, and Lifuka and Foa in the Ha'apai Group. Fares range from 50 *seniti* to T\$1.50 depending upon the island and the distance travelled. Passengers usually pay when they get off.

### TAXI

Taxis can be recognised by a 'T' in front of the numbers on the licence plate. There are plenty of taxis on Tongatapu and Vava'u, a few on Lifuka and one on 'Eua.

### Tours

Commercial island tours operate on Tongatapu and Vava'u and less formally on 'Eua and Ha'apai. The TVB will give good advice on the current operators. See the individual island sections for details.

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