

Ha'apai Group



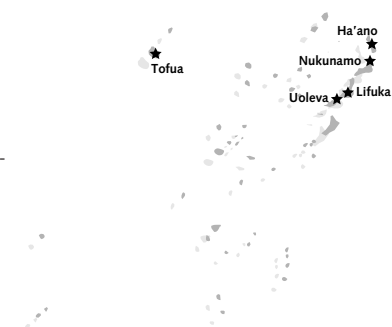
Sprinkled across the kingdom's central waters, the Ha'apai Group is an idyllic South Pacific paradise – low coral islands, vibrant reefs and kilometres of deserted white beaches fringed with coconut palms. Traditional culture is not something you pay an entry fee to experience in Ha'apai – it's all around, unexploited and alive. You won't find the distractions of shops, nightspots (or even running water at times) but those willing to forgo the trimmings reap the rewards. Even bare-brass budgeters can walk across a reef for a slice of paradise in a *fale* (traditional thatched house) on a large patch of sand. And only a scattering of tourists visit each year.

Of its 62 islands, 45 are uninhabited, including pyramidal Kao and its smoking partner, Tofua – venture to the remote shores of Tofua, hike up its Jurassic Park-cum-mooncape crater and peer into the glowing caldera. Lifuka's more accessible diving sites hold their own in the diversity stakes too. Divers enter a whole new realm exploring blackened walls laden with colourful corals, while pelagics rise from the depths nearby. Whale-watching is largely an incidental experience while travelling between islands, though low visitor numbers allow you to view the mammals without the crowds. A kayaking adventure through the islands is one of the most exhilarating adventures the world offers.

The languorous pace of life in Ha'apai has led many of its residents to relocate to Tongatapu or more distant shores in search of further opportunities, keeping the population of the island group low. People here largely subsist on agriculture and fishing: 'Uiha's fish and seafood ends up on the plates of the kingdom's finest restaurants.

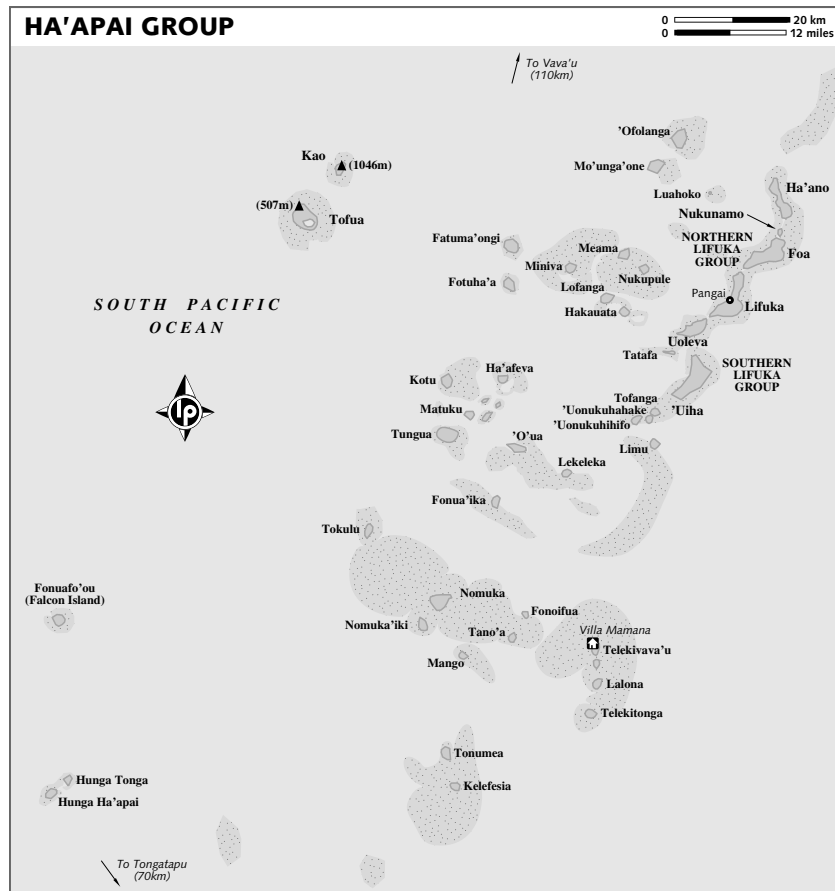
HIGHLIGHTS

- Powering your own sea-kayak exploration to uninhabited **Nukunamo** (p237) or traditional **Ha'ano** (p237)
- **Diving** (p227) into Ha'apai's underwater world with massive coral heads, sea caves and a coral arch
- Peering into the glowing caldera and exploring the mooncape crater on the dramatic volcanic island of **Tofua** (p240)
- Walking on water (well...) between the islands of **Lifuka** and **Uoleva** (p238)
- Imagining yourself castaway, staying in a *tapa*-lined *fale* on an otherwise deserted tropical beach at **Uoleva** (p237)



■ POPULATION: 8138

■ AREA: 110 SQ KM



HISTORY

Archaeological excavations in the village of Hihifo, in southern Pangai, revealed a settlement dating back over 3000 years when Lapita pottery (an early form of distinctive Polynesian ware, named after the site in New Caledonia where it was first found) carbon dated to this period was unearthed. Lifuka's other archaeological sights include the Velata Mound Fortress (probably built in the 15th century AD), several large burial mounds, and an ancient stone quarry at Holopeka Beach.

The first European to visit the Ha'apai Group was Dutchman Abel Tasman, who stopped at Nomuka in 1643 for fresh water. Nomuka's sweet water springs were to be the

focus of many visits to the group throughout the years of European Pacific exploration.

Subsequently, Ha'apai became the scene of several notable events in Tongan history. On Lifuka in 1777, Captain James Cook and his men narrowly escaped unwittingly becoming the main course at a cannibalistic feast they had been invited to attend, a feast which resulted in Cook's christening Tonga the 'Friendly Islands'. (See p233 for more information on this encounter.) The famous mutiny on the *Bounty* occurred in Ha'apai in 1789.

Still later, in 1806, the British privateer *Port-au-Prince* was ransacked off Lifuka's north coast; survivor Will Mariner's tale of his years spent in Tonga has become the

classic account of pre-Christian life on the islands (see p236).

Ha'apai was the first island group in the Tongan archipelago to convert to Christianity, due to the efforts of convert Taufa'ahau, who was baptised George in 1831 and became the first king of the House of Tupou. He set the stage for a united Tonga and established the royal line that remains in power to this day.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Snappy, pack-forming dogs are occasionally hazardous here, as elsewhere in Tonga (see p278). Seek out tide charts and local knowledge on currents before slipping into the sea.

Ha'apai's brackish water should be used only for washing and bathing. Drinking water is collected in rainwater cisterns.

ACTIVITIES

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

To make the most of a trip to Ha'apai, including an exploration of its remote outer islands (including Ha'ano and 'Uihia), you'll need to plan in advance and have plenty of time to join local boats or the funds to privately charter them. Conditions can be fickle, so save that 1000-page novel and hammock-snoozing for the less idyllic days.

Those with a burning desire to visit volcanic Tofua (totally justified) to hike up onto the crater rim, or to dive Tofua's amazing watery surroundings, will need plenty of lead time to privately charter a boat (p241). You could also join a trip organised by Mariners Guided Camping Tours (see below), Happy Ha'apai Divers (p228) or foreign aid workers (for organisation contact details, see p284).

Camping & Hiking

Camping experiences on remote islands include fishing, possible whale sightings and the very cool experience of just being out there (especially climbing volcanic Tofua; see p240).

Mariners Guided Camping Tours (☎ 60374; fax 60504; www.tongacamping.com) has clever ways of tempting the intrepid out to Ha'apai's more

remote islands – some uninhabited, some offering a traditional cultural experience, one an active volcano. Two-/seven-day Tofua volcano tours (NZ\$500/1050) and four-/seven-day island camping tours (NZ\$400/1300) operate out of Pangai. The 13-day camping and volcano tour (NZ\$1950) departs Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu), and ends in Pangai or Nuku'alofa. Tents, camp beds and fishing gear are supplied. You'll need to allow for a week in Ha'apai for the two-day Tofua trip to maximise the chances of good weather. Check the website for set tour departure dates or contact Trevor to organise a tour.

Diving & Snorkelling

Ha'apai has a dive site to suit every whim or fancy – caves, channels, tunnels, drifts, drop-offs, coral gardens, volcanic black walls framing an explosion of colour, and bommies and walls rising from the depths to bring large pelagics into view. In season (June to November), humpback whales add to the aquatic mix – their mesmerising singing can be heard when you dip your head below the surface. The reefs and shallows of the Ha'apai Group offer amazing underwater scenery, while outstanding visibility (from 25m to 30m in summer to over 50m in winter) and very comfortable water temperatures (23°C to 29°C) combine to create magnificent conditions for diving.

Impressive sites around the islands of 'Ofolanga, Mo'unga'one and Luahoko include huge sea caves and an incredible coral arch (one of only a few in the South Pacific) for experienced divers.

The remarkable seascapes around Tofua and Kao offer unique sites with pink soft corals set against black walls and visibility (50m plus) so clear 'it's like diving in gin'. There's incredible diversity, with lots of pelagics and turtles the size of tables. Getting there takes some advanced planning.

The exposed nature of the Ha'apai Group can make diving the outer sites (up to 45 minutes by boat from Foa) a weather-dependent event. Getting out to the best snorkelling spots requires a boat, but there are some lively coral heads off Houmale'eia Beach on Foa and throughout the island's reefs. The Tongan Visitors Bureau (TVB) has a display board listing some of Ha'apai's diverse mapped dive sights. Snorkellers can join dive groups or charter a local boat.

Happy Ha'apai Divers (☎ 60639; www.tonga-diver.com; P0 Box 61, Pangai) focuses on long, slow dives. Based at Sandy Beach Resort on Foa, this reputable professional operator also runs NZ-based Ocean Blue Adventures. Diving tends to concentrate on the northern Lifuka Group and two-day diving trips to Tofua and Kao were set to commence in 2006. It offers one/two boat dives for US\$65/90, six-/10-dive packages for US\$255/400 and PADI Scuba Diver/Open Water courses (US\$200/410, including gear). Dive Masters will take the time with less-experienced or rusty divers to ensure they feel comfortable. Discover Scuba 'try' dives cost US\$75 and rental gear is available. Most dive sites are within 20 minutes of the dive base. Asthmatics require a specialist medical clearance to dive.

Snorkellers are welcome to join dive boats if there is room (US\$65, including wetsuit and gear).

Horse Riding

Some guesthouses and the TVB can arrange horse hire (around T\$30 per day), without saddles.

Sea-Kayaking

The seeming remoteness of this string of beautiful islands, with its ample deserted beaches, makes self-powered sea explorations an enticing option – from a short sea-kayak adventure to uninhabited Nukunamo (p237) or a longer stretch to traditional Ha'ano (p237), to a multiday organised expedition throughout the island group.

Happy Ha'apai Divers (above) rents sea kayaks with a spray skirt, vest and paddle for US\$20 per day. Sandy Beach Resort has single and double kayaks for guest use.

Friendly Islands Kayak Company (☎ /fax 70173; www.fikco.com) supplies all the equipment for its 11-day kayak camping tour (US\$2280) through Ha'apai's Lifuka archipelago – an amazing experience, especially when whales are visiting. The kayaking covers nine days, with an orientation in Pangai. Equipment is shipped from Vava'u, so prior booking is essential. See p227 for further details.

Mariners Guided Camping Tours (right) also run camping and kayaking adventures.

Whale-Watching

You don't have to leave the shores to whale-watch in season (mainly July to November,

with possible sightings in June) – just scan beyond reefs for breaching and spouts. Inter-island journeys, including the boat transfers between Pangai and the 'resorts' on Uoleva, are often accompanied by whale sightings.

Happy Ha'apai Divers (left) runs small-group whale-watching trips (half-/full-day US\$45/70, including snorkelling gear) with environmental awareness and minimal impact to the animals.

Mariners Guided Camping Tours (☎ 60374; fax 60504; www.tongacamping.com) is able to organise whale-watching trips on demand between August and October.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The week-long **Ha'apai Festival** starts on the outer islands and concludes on Lifuka on Emancipation Day (4 June). Visitors are heartily welcomed to experience traditional culture.

LIFUKA GROUP

Most visitors to Ha'apai stay within the Lifuka group of islands, found along the eastern barrier reef of Ha'apai, including Ha'ano, Nukunamo, Foa, Lifuka, Uoleva, Tatafa and 'Uiha. Lifuka Island, with its main town Pangai (the island group's capital), is the centre of Ha'apai's limited activity, including the airport and main inter-island ferry port.

LIFUKA ISLAND

area 11 sq km / pop 2966

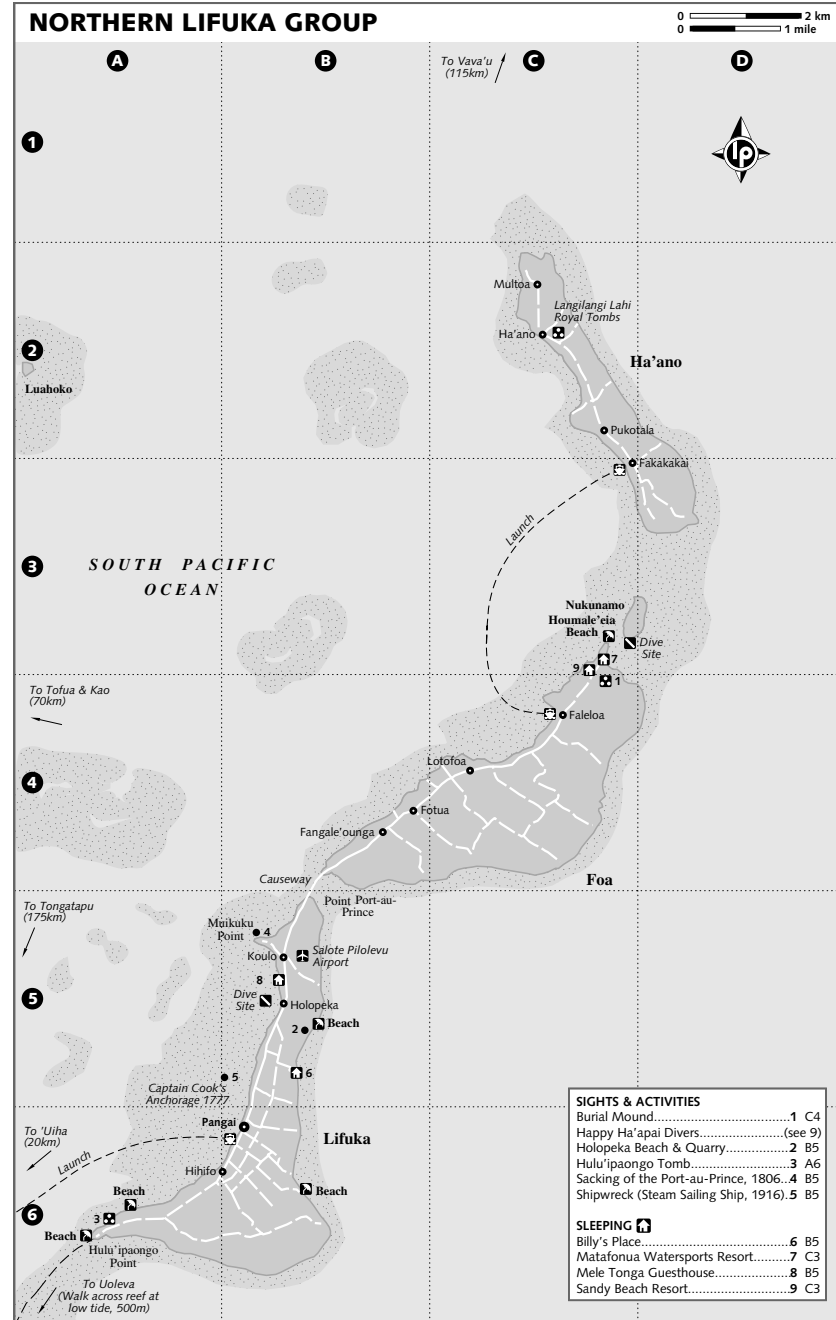
Lifuka's main town, Pangai, holds Lifuka's basic services (shops, post office, bank etc) and several guesthouses. There's little for the visitor to do (to the delight of many travellers) other than wander along the empty white beaches that nearly encircle the island, and swim and snorkel in the western shore's calm blue water or the wilder and more dramatic eastern coast.

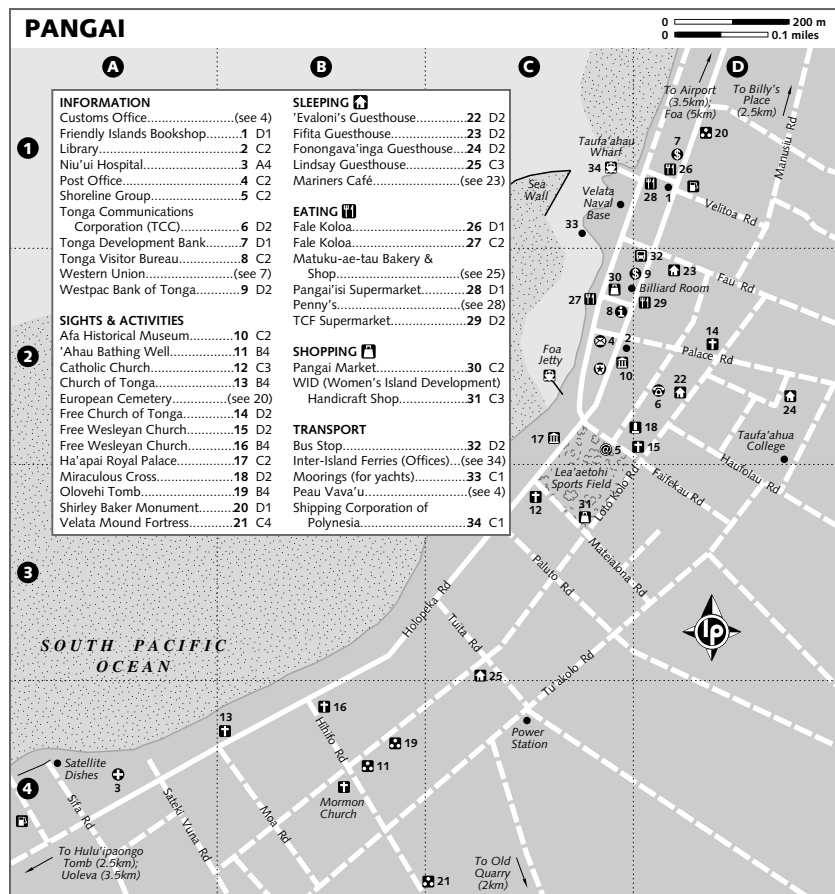
Information

For weather forecasts, call ☎ 21555 or listen to 89.5FM.

BOOKSHOPS

Friendly Islands Bookshop (☎ 60198; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Stocks some highly recommended and bestselling books on Tonga and the Pacific region (including *Tonga Islands: William*





Mariner's Account and Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* among other paperbacks. Books take one week to arrive if ordered from the larger shop in Nuku'alofa. Also stocks Kodak film, magazines (*New Idea*, *Woman's Day*) from a range of dates, stationery and fishing supplies.

EMERGENCY

Emergency (☎ 911)

Fire (☎ 22222)

Police (☎ 21222)

INTERNET ACCESS

Mariners Café (Fau Rd; per 15min T\$3; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 6-9pm Sun)

Shoreline Group (Faifekau Rd; per 15min/hr T\$2.30/9.20; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) Easily found under the radio tower.

LIBRARIES

Library (cnr Holopeka & Palace Rds; ☎ 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) A valuable resource run by volunteers with donated books. Become a member for T\$5; donate books for free.

MEDIA

89.5FM (broadcasting ☎ 7am-11pm) English and Tongan broadcasts, including weather updates.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Niu'ui Hospital (☎ 60201; Hihifo) Pretty basic facilities. Appointments are necessary and the pharmacy is open 8.30am to 4.30pm.

MONEY

MasterCard and Visa can be used for larger purchases and payments at Mariner's Café,

Sandy Beach Resort and Happy Ha'apai Divers. Elsewhere, use cash.

Tonga Development Bank (Holopeka Rd; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Offers Western Union money transfers.

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.

POST

Post office (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Mail can be sent c/o Post Office, Pangai, Ha'apai. The Customs & Inland Revenue office is also based here.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Card-operated phones are located outside the Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC) office and at one of the *fale koloa* (small grocery kiosks) on Holopeka Rd in the centre of town. Purchase telephone cards at TCC, Westpac Bank of Tonga and Pangai'si Supermarket, opposite the wharf. **Tonga Communications Corporation** (TCC; ☎ 60255) On the road parallel to Holopeka Rd, between Palace and Faifekau Rds, in the centre of Pangai. Fax services are available.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tonga Visitors Bureau (TVB; ☎ /fax 60733; www.tongaholiday.com; Holopeka Rd; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) On the corner opposite the Tonga Cooperative Federation (TCF) supermarket, the tourist office stocks some Ha'apai brochures, posts tide timetables and has some display information on dive sites. Depending upon the mood of the staff, you may get assistance with accommodation bookings, horse riding or boat charter queries, but don't count on it. You may also be told to 'go ask Mariner's Café'.

Sights

The ferry arrival from Tongatapu at the wharf, and its subsequent unpacking, is the peak of excitement for the week. A pretty section of the waterfront, south of the wharf and market, has picnic tables under pines with views of Tofua (and its puffing smoke) and Kao.

Lifuka's sights can be easily covered in about half a day by bike, by horse, by taxi or on foot. 'Evaloni's Guesthouse (p233) will negotiate to drive guests to sights of interest on request.

For details on diving, snorkelling, sea-kayaking and whale-watching around the Ha'apai islands, see p227.

On hot afternoons, the wharf is a writhing mass of drenched, cooling down kids. Feel free to join in (people here swim fully clothed). Visitors are welcome to join any game of basketball, volleyball, rugby or Aussie rules football going on.

PANGAI'S BUILDINGS

Pangai's colourful *fale koloa* and decaying old wooden warehouse buildings make for an atmospheric sight. The understated **Ha'apai Royal Palace** is the white weatherboard and red-roofed building close to the Catholic Church.

On the lawn of the **Free Wesleyan Church** is the concrete outline of a cross commemorating a 'miracle' that occurred there in 1975. Residents report that one night they saw a flame falling from the sky to land in front of the church. In the morning they found the outline of a cross burned into the grass. Cynics in the village attribute the whole 'miracle' to mischievous teenagers with kerosene tins and cigarette lighters.

The unusual-looking **Church of Tonga** (Holopeka Rd) at the southern end of Pangai has touches of Middle Eastern architecture.

AFA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

The interesting collection of **Afa Historical Museum** (Holopeka Rd; ☎ opening times vary) includes pieces of 3000-year-old Lapita pottery, traditional headrests, old photographs, rocks from Tofua and items used in the production of handicrafts, which the proprietor Virginia has lovingly collected. A folder of newspaper clippings sheds light on the history and geology of volcanic Tofua, but there is little other signage.

HIHIFO'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Hihifo, the village at the south end of Pangai, hides some archaeological relics seemingly of more interest to pigs than anyone else.

Hidden behind a low wire fence in a grove of ironwood is **Oloveli Tomb** (Loto Kolo Rd). It's somewhat overgrown and neglected, but the upright memorial stone at the southwest corner and the large beach-rock slabs that make up the tired walls echo its former splendour. (There's an impressive banyan tree to climb behind it.)

The tomb was built in the late 1700s for Nanasipau'u, eldest sister of the reigning Tu'i Tonga. It's claimed that, as part of her funeral, those selected as her attendants in the afterlife were killed and buried around the outside of this tomb. Nanasipau'u's daughter, Latufuipeka, and her daughter's husband, Tuita Kahomovailahi, are also buried here. The modern extension to the south of the tomb is the burial ground for families holding the noble title of Tuita.

Freshwater bathing wells were owned by the highest chiefs and were *tapu* (taboo) to commoners. '**Ahau Bathing Well**' (cnr Hihifo & Loto Kolo Rds) belonged to the chief Laufilitonga while he and his people were staying at the Fortress of Velata during the 1820s. Today it's nothing more than a muddy dip with garbage and a twisted palm growing out of it.

The 3000-year-old Lapita pottery was excavated a block south of here on the corner of Moa and Loto Kolo Rds, but there's nothing to see nowadays.

Just south of the bathing well, is the site of the circular **Velata Mound Fortress**, a type of ring ditch fortification found throughout Tonga, Fiji and Samoa. Today it's marked with an empty concrete plaque but the artificial ridges are virtually indistinguishable under the vegetation and strewn refuse.

Velata was remarkable in having the extra protection of a double ditch. A 2.5m- to 3m-high defensive wall would have been built on the inner ring that lies between 15m and 20m inside the outer ditch. Historians believe that Velata was first built in the 15th century. In the 1820s Laufilitonga, who later became the 39th and last Tu'i Tonga, restored the fort as a stronghold against the Taufa'ahau dynasty. In 1826 the fortress was burned when Laufilitonga was defeated in battle by Taufa'ahau, the future King George Tupou I.

SHIRLEY BAKER MONUMENT & EUROPEAN CEMETERY

In the European Cemetery 800m north of Pangai, the grave and monument of Rev 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.

Following the former missionary and controversial politician's enforced exile in 1890, Baker returned in 1898 with the per-

mission of King George Tupou II and lived out his days in Hihifo, just south of Pangai, where he died on 16 April 1903.

A Tongan cemetery, its sand and coral mounds decorated with colourful artificial floral tributes and handmade quilts, is directly opposite.

HOLOPEKA BEACH & OLD QUARRY

Sandy Holopeka Beach, east of Holopeka village, is a rarely visited spot with lovely rock pools set in natural stone terraces – similar to those on Tongatapu's south coast. At low tide the deep crevasses are full of coral and fish, though snorkelling is only recommended at low tide on a calm day as the sea surging into crevasses can make it dangerous.

At low tide you can see the remnants of an ancient beach-stone **quarry** and several stages of block removal. Quarries of this type supplied the large stone blocks found in the retaining walls of chiefly tombs from the 13th to 18th centuries.

SOUTHERN LIFUKA ISLAND

On the south side of Pangai is the village of Hihifo. From Hihifo, you can continue south along the dirt road all the way to **Hulu'ipaonga Point**, with its wide sweep of white beach (and a disappointing nonbiodegradable waste problem).

West of the road, about 200m short of the beach, is the **Hulu'ipaonga Tomb**. As described by Captain Cook, this is the highest burial mound in Lifuka and the Mata'uvave line of chiefs is buried here. The first Mata'uvave was sent to Ha'apai in the 15th century to establish political control over northern Ha'apai for Tu'i Tonga Kau'ulufonuafeikai. His success resulted in his appointment as governor and Tu'i Ha'apai.

It's possible to walk between the southern tip of Lifuka and the northern tip of Uoleva at low tide (see p237).

Sleeping

All of Lifuka's accommodation is basic with cold showers unless otherwise stated. Most can make arrangements for boat trips and horse hire and offer free pick-up from the airport or wharf.

Camping on beaches or in undesignated areas is illegal throughout the Ha'apai Group unless you are on a guided trip (see p227) or have permission from the owners.

The tourist office or Mariners Café may have details on long-term accommodation rentals.

PANGAI

Fonongava'inga Guesthouse (Langilangi Guesthouse; ☎ 60038; fax 60200; vimahi@kalianet.to; Palace Rd; s/d/tr T\$15/25/45) Sitting at the back of town in the middle of Lifuka, this place, also known as Langilangi Guesthouse, is a six-minute walk from the town, wharf and beach. There's a broad veranda, a homely light-filled communal lounge, and clean facilities. Fans are available and breakfast (T\$6) and dinner (T\$20 to T\$30) can be arranged; kitchen use is T\$3 per day. Langilangi enjoys teaching local crafts to guests, assisting them to create a small traditional weaving to take home.

'Evaloni's Guesthouse (☎ 60029; Loto Kolo Rd; s/d T\$15/25, d with private bathroom T\$45, ste d with private bathroom incl breakfast T\$75) While guest room décor is hardly South Seas (the elaborate 'honeymoon suites' feature mirror-backed king-sized beds and private bathrooms), the rooms are comfortable and fan-cooled. You can shoot some pool on the long, *tapa*-lined veranda and dine there or in the sun-shaded garden *fale*. Guests can use the well-equipped kitchen (T\$1.50 per day) or order meals; breakfast feasts include cheese omelettes, muffins, fruit pancakes and fruit (T\$15). Discuss sightseeing options with the owners, who can arrange tours and transportation.

Fifita Guesthouse (☎ 60213; Fau Rd; s/d T\$25/35, f with sitting room T\$65) Fifita's central location behind Mariner's 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. Toast and jam breakfasts are supplemented with some fruit, an egg or fried 'banana pancakes'. No communal lounge makes it a bit drab in rainy periods.

Lindsay Guesthouse (☎ /fax 60107; cnr Loto Kolo & Tuita Rds; s/d/f T\$20/30/50, with bathroom T\$45/55) The warm and irresistible scent of baking bread wafts across the lawn from the bakery – the attached grocery shop makes breakfast an easily self-catered affair, although the guesthouse can provide breakfast for T\$6 to T\$10. It's a clean and friendly spot, with a broad veranda and communal sitting room and kitchen, though you may have to beg for the one hot shower. The nearby town water pump is sometimes audible. Rental bikes (T\$8 per day) are generally reserved for guests. Order evening meals (such as fish and chips, fresh seafood or salami pizza; T\$15 to T\$20) early in the day.

AROUND THE ISLAND

All beachside accommodation is located outside Pangai. The east side has big waves, while the west side is sheltered and offers magnificent sunsets and views of Kao.

Billy's Place (☎ 60336; s/d fale incl breakfast T\$55/65, larger s/d fale T\$65/75, self-contained fale T\$100) Ropes of buoys in faded orange, white and yellow dangle from pandanus roots between Billy's open-sided dining terrace and views of breaking surf (and whales in season) beyond the quiet beach. Boardwalk paths wind through gardens, connecting secluded and well-presented bungalow-style rooms with

COOK'S 'FRIENDLY ISLANDS' NOT SO FRIENDLY?

On Captain James Cook's third Pacific voyage in 1777 he spent over two months in Tonga. 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. Needless to say, the foreigners were impressed. Cook dubbed the Ha'apai Group the 'Friendly Islands' after the apparent disposition of its inhabitants.

Thirty years later it was learned that the entertainment had been part of a Tongan conspiracy to raid the ships *Resolution* and *Discovery* for their plainly visible wealth. The plan was to gather the Englishmen into a convenient place, 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. Having previously agreed to follow the chief's plan to take action during the afternoon, the nobles failed to do so at the appointed time. Finau was so incensed at such a defiance of his orders that the operation was abandoned altogether and the Englishmen never learned how narrowly they had escaped.

clean, shared facilities nearby; kitchen use per day is T\$5. Nonguests can also enjoy the food here (lunch/dinner T\$12/20), and a Sunday *umu* (feast cooked in a stone underground oven) 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 are allowed and it's a minimum two-night stay.

Mele Tonga Guesthouse (☎ 60042; Holopeka Rd, Holopeka; house d T\$20, fale s/d T\$20/30) The secluded *fale* just back from the western shore is a beachfront find for bargain hunters. Lantern-lit, it has a window overlooking the water, lacy overlays over the double bed, a table and two covered car bucket seats. There's a separate BBQ *fale* with a dining table and standard rooms in the house. Breakfast/lunch/dinner is available for T\$8/10/12. About 100m south of the guesthouse a channel leads out from the beach and through the reef to a reasonable snorkelling spot.

From the airport turn left onto the main road, walk five minutes then turn right into a driveway on the north side of the Mormon school. Airport pick-ups and transfers to Pangai, 3km away, for shopping are free. A taxi to or from Pangai costs T\$5.

Eating

There are few options to eat out in Pangai. 'Evaloni's and Fonongava'inga Guesthouses and Billy's Place may accept nonguests for dinner if you book in advance. Foa (p236) offers further options.

Mariners Café (☎ 60374; VHF Channel 16; Fau Rd; meals & snacks T\$6.50-16.50; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 6-9pm Sun) 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 has a good range of tasty and fresh dishes, including Thai green chicken curry, fresh tuna stir-fries and burgers. The high-crust pizzas rate highly and beer, wine and plunger coffee are served. It's a good place to come for local knowledge. (It's occasionally closed from 3pm to 5pm so the owner can go fishing.)

Penny's (Waterfront; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a lovely view over the harbour from the first floor of the green waterfront building, Penny's was set to open its doors at the

time of research and planned to serve meals and hire out bicycles (T\$15).

Pangai Market (cnr Waterfront & Palace Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Pangai's market opposite the waterfront is half fresh produce, half flea market. Pickings are often slim and you'll be lucky to find much more than root crops and bananas most of the time. Tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers are snapped up quickly. Saturday mornings are busiest.

Tonga Cooperative Federation (TCF; Holopeka Rd) The supermarket's limited choice includes racks of tinned meat, biscuits, tinned fruit and vegetables, two-minute noodles, UHT milk, formula milk and nappies (diapers), some refrigerated fruit and 18kg buckets of edible dripping.

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 well-stocked in bread, jam-filled rolls and *keki* (fried doughnut-like balls). There's a mad rush on Sunday afternoon.

The multicoloured *fale koloa* around the town sell their own selection of groceries, including two-minute noodles, tinned products, eggs, UHT milk and juice, frozen chicken, some fruit and vegetables and bread. One opposite Friendly Islands Bookshop at the corner of Holopeka and Velitua Rds, sells some delicious homemade baked goods including cake (banana, chocolate and coconut). You can pick up a chocolate-coated creamy vanilla ice cream wherever you see a 'Topsy' sign. **Pangai'isi Supermarket** (☎ 7am-11pm) sells phonecards, while the *fale koloa* under the big tree opposite the market sells fish.

Drinking

Beer and wine is served at Mariner's Café (see left) but other than that you'll need to buy your own and consume it at your guesthouse. Bottles of (dubious heritage) rum and vodka (T\$30) are sold in the *fale koloa* next to the TCF; beer is sold in the one opposite it.

Entertainment

On Friday nights, *kava* (intoxicating drink made from the root of the pepper shrub) clubs meet in several halls around Pangai. Ask someone to point you in the right direction – these are largely male affairs, though.

Other entertainment on the island generally revolves around church activities and includes dances.

Shopping

Women's Island Development Handicraft Shop (☎ 60478; Loto Kolo Rd) This women's handicraft cooperative sells *tapa* (mulberry bark cloth), cards and various woven items made from pandanus leaves.

Ha'apai is well known for its quality traditional *tapa*, which many expat Tongans purchase on order. Tupou at 'Evaloni's Guesthouse (see p233) may have some *tapa* for sale, while Langilangi at Fonongava'inga Guesthouse (see p233) can acquaint you with traditional weaving.

Coconut oil scented with candlenut or sandalwood can be purchased from several *fale koloa*.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The main Lifuka-Foa road bisects Ha'apai's Salote Pilolevu Airport, 3km north of Pangai. **Airlines Tonga Air Fiji** (Airlines Tonga; ☎ 23690; fax 23238; www.airlinestonga.com) and Peau Vava'u service Ha'apai daily except Sunday. The round-trip flight services from Tongatapu alternate between stopping in Ha'apai then Vava'u or Vava'u then Ha'apai before returning to Tongatapu. See p285 for details.

The office of **Peau Vava'u** (☎ 60717; cnr Waterfront & Palace Rds) is next to the post office. Confirm flights 72 and 24 hours prior to departure.

BOAT

The MV 'Olovaha and the MV *Pulupaki* stop twice weekly at Pangai on both their northbound and southbound runs between Tongatapu and Vava'u. The ships' offices beside the passenger shelter at Taufa'ahau Wharf only open on days when the ferries arrive. See p286 for ferry schedules and fares. The Church of Tonga's MV *Siu Pele* (see p288) runs from Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu) through the Ha'apai islands weekly.

The **Free Wesleyan Church** (☎ 60718, 60107, 60507) boat MV *Fetu Aho V* services Ha'apai's islands (irregularly and on demand) and may be available for charter.

Ha'apai is a port of entry into Tonga, but the immigration officer is not always in Ha'apai. If you're arriving in Ha'apai by

yacht, you must check in with the **customs officer** (☎ 60608, 60666) upon arrival; the office is inside the post office. See also p295. Although the entrance to the harbour looks tricky on the sea chart the marker buoys are perfectly aligned.

There are marginally protected anchorages along the lee shores of the islands of Lifuka, Foa, Ha'ano, Uoleva, Ha'afeva, Nomuka and Nomuka'iki. Fuel will have to be transported in jerry cans from the 'service station' near the corner of Holopeka and Velitua Rds, or nearby the hospital. Getting sufficient supplies of anything is sometimes difficult in Ha'apai.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most accommodation providers offer free airport pick-ups and drop-offs. Taxis charge T\$5 between the airport and Pangai, while the sporadic bus service between Pangai and the airport turn-off costs T\$1.

BICYCLE

Lifuka and neighbouring Foa, connected by a causeway, are both fairly flat and ideal for exploring by bicycle.

Bicycles (T\$8 to T\$15 per day) can be rented from Penny's (opposite). Sandy Beach Resort (p236), Billy's Place (p233) and Lindsay Guesthouse (p233) provide bicycles for guest use; the latter two may loan surplus bikes to nonguests.

BOAT

The TVB and guesthouses will generally assist in arranging boat transport around the island, or you can organise it directly with **Jim** (☎ 60612, 60292), 'the Boat Man'. Negotiate a price before heading out.

BUS

A sporadic bus service operates between Hihifo, south of Pangai, and Foa's northernmost village of Faleloa 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 costs T\$2.

FOA

area 13 sq km / pop 1434

Houmale'eia Beach on the tip of Foa is the best beach on the 'mainland', with sandy water access, sublime views of Nukunamo and beautiful snorkelling (the best reef is opposite the Sandy Beach Resort). Connected by a causeway to Lifuka, the heavily wooded island boasts an ancient **burial mound** about 500m south of Houmale'eia Beach.

Sleeping & Eating

Matafonua Watersports Resort (contact Sandy Beach Resort; www.sandybeachresort.de; fale d & tw T\$80) Look-

ing for water views over foreshore foliage from your private terrace? This place was purpose-built as a dive resort in 2006. The uncluttered, elevated *fale* have louvre windows and mosquito nets over beds. The freshwater supply here comes from underground tanks and provides good 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 with bathroom US\$140) This boutique-style labour of love, with beachfront bungalows on the magnificent white-sand beach at the northern end of Foa, is popular with

European holiday-makers and honeymooners. The modern bungalows are comfortable though plain – offering no distraction from the beautiful surrounds – and are oriented for privacy and sunset terrace views (crack open the duty-free, ice is provided!). Large water tanks and solar panels guarantee warm, freshwater showers (a rarity in Ha'apai). Included in the price are bicycles, snorkelling gear, kayaks, airport and town (bank) transfers, laundry service and borrowing rights to the English/German library. Horse riding (T\$30) can be organised. No children under 12. Breakfast/dinner is US\$9/29. Depending on guest numbers, nonguests can book for three-course dinners (call before noon), which have a main-course choice of lobster, fresh fish or a meat dish. Snacks (sandwiches, burgers; T\$7 to T\$15), pizza (T\$22) and cocktails are served at the terrace bar.

Getting There & Away

There's a sporadic bus service between Pangai and Faleloa, Foa's northernmost village, which generally serves students between about 8am and 4pm weekdays and 8am and noon Saturday (T\$1 one way).

The 15km of mostly flat and reasonable road from Pangai to Sandy Beach Resort and Houmale'eia Beach takes around one hour to cycle; the taxi fare is about T\$15. It's 1.5km north of Faleloa (a 15-minute walk from the village).

NUKUNAMO

The picture-postcard island viewed from the tip of Foa is Nukunamo, an uninhabited island with a shining white beach covered with beautiful shells. You can walk around and through the island (take thongs or sandals – the harsh rock and coral is a killer on the feet); the mound here was built as a platform, used by members of the royal family for hunting pigeons. Coral heads in the reef between the two islands make for some beautiful easy-access snorkelling. You'll need a strong swimming ability and awareness of tide tables as currents through the pass are powerful. You can also cross by kayak (see p227).

HA'ANO

area 6.6 sq km / pop 773

Cultural travellers will get a good dose of traditional Tongan life on the strikingly

clean and friendly island of Ha'ano. You may even be able to cruise its lovely beaches and four pleasant villages by horse and cart (contact the TVB or call ☎ 60374).

Getting to Ha'ano requires the finances to charter a boat (T\$50 one way) or the time to wait for the water taxis that leave from Faleloa jetty, on Foa, early morning and midafternoon (around T\$5 one way). You could turn your Ha'ano visit into an adventurous day by taking a double kayak (p228) across from the tip of Foa in the morning and returning in the early afternoon. Check tides and weather reports wherever you get your kayak from and let them know where you're going. Bank on between one and two hours paddling each way.

UOLEVA

area 3.5 sq km

If you're looking for paradise on a budget, Uoleva is the place to come for it. With some of the finest, most peaceful white-sand beaches imaginable and little to do other than swim, snorkel and fish, those that can withstand the lack of creature comforts reap the natural rewards. A few people cross over from Lifuka to tend their livestock, but the island is basically uninhabited except for the penned pigs and the 'resort' (a loose term!) owners and guests. Yachts moor off the sandy cove.

There's some superb snorkelling around the reefs at the western end of Uoleva the broad bays on the island's sheltered northern shore and the protected Community Clam Circle. The 16th-century **burial mounds** at the centre are difficult to find without a guide.

Sleeping & Eating

Uoleva's (very basic) accommodation has unbeatable, absolute beachfront positions on a broad, white-sand beach on the north-west coast. Bring your own drinks, some food and mosquito repellent for your stay, which can be booked directly or through the TVB. The only trouble with this paradise is that there's no love lost between Uoleva's 'resort' owners.

Diana Resort (☎ 60612; s/d/f fale T\$18/25/45) This is an absolute beach-bum paradise and a great place to stay, where you can ponder the stars and lapping waves over the nightly beach bonfire. Set in a coconut plantation,

WILLIAM MARINER

Thanks to a series of serendipitous incidents, the world has an extensive account of the customs, language, religion and government of the Tongans before the arrival of Christianity.

In February 1805 William Charles Mariner, the well-educated 15-year-old son of an English sea captain, went to sea on the privateer *Port-au-Prince*. The voyage of plunder and pillage took the ship around the Americas and through the Pacific, finally anchoring at the northern end of Lifuka in the Ha'apai Group on 29 November 1806. The crew were immediately welcomed with yams and barbecued pork. The reception seemed friendly enough, but the following day, they became increasingly aware that some sort of plot was afoot and that appropriate caution should be exercised in dealing with the Tongans.

Captain Brown, the whaling master who had assumed command upon the death of the original skipper several months earlier, was convinced that the threat was imaginary and chose to ignore it. On 1 December the attack was launched while 300 hostile Tongans were aboard the ship. The British, sorely outnumbered, chose to destroy the ship, its crew and its attackers rather than allow it to be taken. Young Mariner had gone to procure the explosives when he met with several locals, who escorted him ashore past the fallen bodies of his shipmates.

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, or at least a young chief in his own country, and ordered that his life be preserved.

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 a general panic among the Tongans. Calmly accepting his fate, Mariner pantomimed an explanation of the phenomenon and initiated a sort of rapport with the Tongans that would carry him through the following four years.

Although a few other crew members of the *Port-au-Prince* were spared, Mariner was the only one taken so completely under the wing of Finau and he was therefore privy to most of the goings-on in Tongan politics. He learned the language well and travelled about the island groups with the chief, observing and absorbing the finer points of ceremony and protocol among the people. He was given the name Toki 'Ukamea (Iron Axe). In a moment of compassion Finau appointed one of his royal wives, Mafi Hape, to be Mariner's adoptive mother, as he was sure the young man's real mother at home must have been extremely worried about him.

After the death of Finau, the king's son permitted William to leave Tonga on a passing English vessel. Anticlimactically, back in England, Will Mariner married, fathered 12 children and had an unremarkable career as a stockbroker. Were it not for a chance meeting in a London restaurant with an amateur anthropologist, Dr John Martin, his unique Tongan experiences might forever have been lost to the world. 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.

just metres from the beach, the *tapa*-lined *fale* have mats over sandy floors and enclosed sitting areas. There's no denying the bathroom facilities are rudimentary (water is pumped from the well for a shower), but that contributes to its charm. The owners go fishing every night and cook the catch (which may include lobster) to serve in the mosquito-mesh enclosed kitchen-dining *fale*. Breakfast/dinner is T\$5/12; book meals ahead. On Sunday, guests can assist in the preparation of the *umu*, then feast on it an hour later (T\$12).

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. Each contains good beds, mosquito nets and a funky hurricane lamp, and shares the basic bathroom facilities. The blue, absolute beachfront cabin is the pick of the bunch. Dinner (T\$12; book ahead) includes a generous spread of four tasty Tongan dishes. Breakfast is T\$6 and kitchen use per day is T\$4.50. Handlines, snorkelling gear (T\$4) and a single kayak (T\$15) are available. Lone travellers (particularly women) have found this environment, at times edgy, uncomfortably isolated.

Getting There & Away

You can walk or wade (there is one deep channel to cross) the 1.5km south from Lifuka to Uoleva on the right tide. It takes around 40 minutes to walk from Pangai to Hulu'ipaongo Point on the southern tip of Lifuka (taxi T\$5), around 20 minutes to cross between the islands, and a further hour or so to reach Uoleva's resorts. Get local advice and only cross at low tide, or an hour or so either side of low tide (it can be dangerous – locals have drowned crossing here). Do not cross on a windy day, if the sea is high or if the current is too strong as there is the danger of being swept away. Check tide charts at the TVB or Mariner's Café.

Both resorts offer transfers for guests from Pangai (T\$15 one way), providing a free airport-to-wharf service. Alternatively, catch a ride on a 'Uiha-bound boat (see opposite) and ask to be dropped at Uoleva.

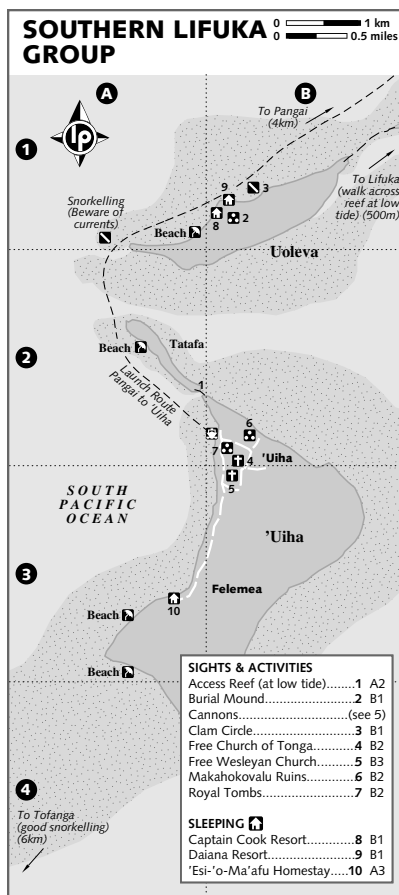
To charter a small boat for a full day (around T\$50) contact the TVB, the resorts themselves or Pangai guesthouses.

'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. 'Uiha's community nursery propagates endangered fruit trees, and rare and medicinal plants from various islands. Its fish and seafood stocks end up in Tongatapu's best restaurants.

Sights & Activities

A large, elevated burial ground in the centre of 'Uiha village contains **royal tombs**. Accompanied by much pomp and ceremony in 1988, the tombs of three relatively obscure members of the royal family were shifted here, two from Pangai and one from



THE MARGARITA

On 26 January 1863 the Peruvian black-birder (slave ship) *Margarita* left Callao (Lima) and was never seen again. According to a preacher on 'Uiha at the time, a ship called in and lured several islanders aboard. When their families on shore realised what had happened, they banged iron pots, hoping to deceive the slavers into returning to shore to pick up more people who'd decided to go along.

The plot worked, the ship was seized, the Tongans were released and then the ship, which was probably the *Margarita*, was subsequently destroyed.

Tongatapu. Ostensibly the project was to consolidate the tombs of the royal family, but rumours of treasure in the cemetery compound prompted the king to look for an excuse to excavate the otherwise *tapu* area. Nothing of importance was unearthed during the excavation.

Walking beyond the royal tombs, you can't miss 'Uiha's fascinating **Free Wesleyan Church**. As evidence of the sinking of the *Margarita*, the 'Uihans display two cannons, one planted in the ground outside the church in 'Uiha village and the other in front of the altar inside – the latter is used as a baptismal font!

A pleasant 10-minute walk north from 'Uiha village leads to the **Makahokovalu Ruins**. There hasn't been much theorising as to the purpose or origin of the complex, which features nine stones standing end in an L-shape (though the name means 'Eight Joined Stones') and a few similar stones lying about the site, reportedly scattered by a cyclone.

You can gain a fairly good insight into the preparation and production of village handicrafts here by looking on as the locals do their nimble work. Horse riding or boat trips to other islands for picnics, swimming, snorkelling and fishing can be arranged through 'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay.

Sleeping & Eating

'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay (☎ 60605, 60438; VHF Channel 16; fale s/d T\$20/25) You'll get a good introduction to village life (and will probably be woken in the early hours by enthusiastic singing and church bells) 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 (use per day T\$3), or with notice the owners will prepare delicious Tongan food (breakfast T\$6, dinner T\$12 to T\$15). You can also book through the TVB.

Getting There & Away

Boats to 'Uiha depart from Pangai most days (most dependably on Saturday and Monday) and can be arranged at the TVB or the waterfront kiosk opposite the market. It costs around T\$10 per person one way. The 'Esi-o-Ma'afu Homestay provides transfers for T\$25/30 for one/two people, one way.

TATAFA

The uninhabited island of Tatafa is just a short, low-tide walk across the reef from northern 'Uiha. It has a lovely surrounding beach, good snorkelling and a large colony of flying foxes. There's a rainwater cistern on the island but it's still wise to carry some water or to ask permission (on 'Uiha or Lifuka) to drink coconuts.

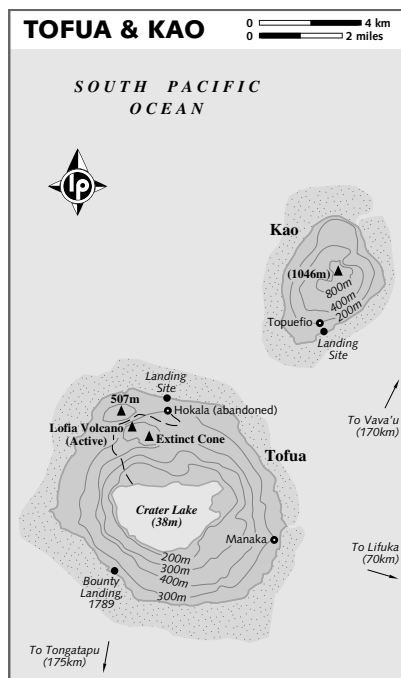
OTHER HA'APAI GROUP ISLANDS

TOFU & KAO

From practically any west-facing shore in the Ha'apai group of islands the pyramid-like cone of Kao (Tonga's highest mountain) and the smouldering, volcanic Tofua (site of the mutiny on the *Bounty*) dominate the scene, and entice you to come a bit closer. Game fishing and diving around Kao and Tofua are excellent.

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY BEACH

On Tofua's southwestern beach, on 28 April 1789, Captain Bligh of HMS *Bounty* and 18 loyalists landed after the famous mutiny. Islanders clubbed quartermaster John Norton to death. Bligh and the rest of the men escaped and embarked on a 6500km journey to Timor in an open boat, with minimal rations and short of water, having not discovered Tofua's large freshwater lake.



Tofua

area 55 sq km / pop 5

Lofia, Tonga's most active volcano, constantly smokes, steams, belches and rumbles near the crater's 507m-high northern rim. In 1874 the king evacuated the island due to excessive volcanic activity. People returned to live here, but the population remains tiny. This is increased as farmers return periodically to tend and harvest *kava*, which cover much of the island's outer slopes. Tofua also produces *tamanu* trees for canoes and *toa* (ironwood) in small noncommercial quantities. The *kilikili* (black volcanic slag pebbles used to decorate grave mounds throughout Tonga) come mostly from Kao and Tofua.

There's a reasonable campsite just above the landing site at Hokala on the northern shore, and fresh water may be available in a rainwater tank at the old school, along a path roughly 450m away. The track to the crater heads uphill from the school.

TOFUVA'S CRATER

Climbing to the edge of Tofua's crater rim can be easily managed in a day and affords

spectacular views of nearby Kao, Tofua's crater lake and the smouldering Lofia Volcano. It's a physically demanding trip. Be sure to carry plenty of water and wear sturdy, enclosed footwear and preferably long trousers. If you plan to climb down to the lake or to Lofia it's worth taking your time and camping on the old crater rim – it's mosquito-free but there's very little shade and no water.

The crater rim is a tough one-hour climb from the old school at Hokala. To find the track, look up towards the ridge; it's 50m due south from the old school. Once you've found the track, it's fairly easy to follow and heads south to southeast up the ridge, the vegetation gradually getting shorter as you climb. Look out for the beautiful orchids.

Much of the inner slopes of the crater are covered in tropical rainforest. At the crater rim is a campsite, and a series of small cairns marks a trail heading northwest. After about 30 minutes (before the vegetation finishes and the ash fields begin) a route leads down to Lofia Volcano and the Crater Lake. The difficult scramble down from the old crater rim, across the barren ash fields and up to the rim of Lofia takes about an hour. Take the direct route to Lofia then pass around its right side to get to the crater lake. (Steer clear of the volcano's noxious fumes.) At the bottom of the circular crater is a beautiful, crystal-clear 250m-deep lake, 38m above sea level (and, to complete the stats, covering 7 sq km). From the crater rim to the lake is about 45 minutes and there's no trail through the virgin rainforest that encircles the lake.

Kao

area 11.6 sq km / pop 0

On clear days, the immense and frighteningly beautiful volcanic cone of Kao is visible from Lifuka and the other main islands. Kao's 1046m summit is frequently shrouded in cloud. Rainforest skirts the bottom third of the mountain and the upper slopes are covered with dense ferns. The island is uninhabited, though farmers harvest *kava* here.

The tough four-hour climb to the summit, usually following one of the southern ridges, is not recommended without a guide as there is no marked trail, and the vegetation is very dense in places. Weather conditions rapidly change for the worse on the summit. When the cloud blows in, visibility can drop below 50m in a few minutes – and half-way up

you'll be in the clouds and scrambling over mossy rocks on your hands and knees. Fresh-water sources are unreliable; take plenty with you, along with warm, waterproof clothing. Good walking boots and trousers will make the trek much more enjoyable.

Strong swimmers will enjoy the dramatic snorkelling off Topuefio, Kao's southern landing site. There are plenty of large fish and a few coral heads cling to the volcanic rock, which suddenly drops off into the deep blue about 20m offshore.

Getting There & Away

Forest-covered red and black lava cliffs rise directly out of the surf and make landing at either island difficult, especially in a strong swell. You'll need a small dinghy to reach the shore and be careful of the slippery rocks when landing. On Tofua there's a landing site below the disused village of Hokala. The landing site on Kao is at Topuefio, which is marked by a couple of *fale*.

Tongans believe that the shark god, Tu'i Tofua, protects the passengers of any boat in the vicinity of Tofua. Should a boat sink, the vessel and its passengers will be carried to shore by benevolent sharks!

Reaching Tofua or Kao is not easy. Few boats are prepared to make the journey and if they are it will be expensive. If you can get a large group together in Lifuka 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) which is a suitable boat for the trip. Happy Ha'apai Divers (p228) and Mariner's Guided Camping Tours (p227) both organise diving and camping/tramping trips to the islands. Another option is to hook up with one of the aid organisations, who organise trips out to Tofua a few times a year so their workers can experience it. They're happy to have any other travellers along and just divide expenses (it saves them some money too) for transport there and back. Any tourist would need to have camping gear and provisions.

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

LUAHOKO

The island of Luahoko is known for the many sea birds and sea turtles that call it home. The island has protected status to conserve the birds and turtles, but some

Tongans still occasionally come here to (illegally) collect eggs. It's about 10km or 15km northwest of Pangai.

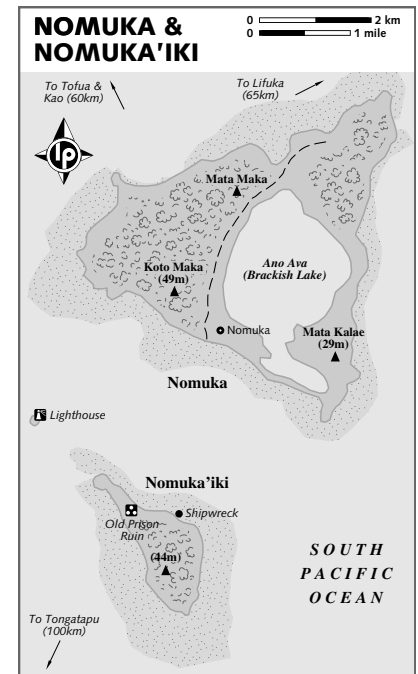
HA'AFEVA

From Ha'afeva, around 40km southwest of Lifuka, you'll get beautiful views of Tofua and Kao and great sunsets. The island's small land area and relatively high population make it a crowded place with plantations occupying all uninhabited land outside the village, but it has a friendly nature. On a reef northwest of the island, the sunken fishing boat *Eki'aki* makes for good diving.

Ha'afeva is accessed most easily on the MV *Olovaha*, which stops or hovers here on its weekly trips between Tongatapu and Lifuka. See p286 for schedules. Small local boats go from Ha'afeva to the tiny outer islands of Matuku, Kotu and Tungua, all of which offer excellent snorkelling.

NOMUKA & NOMUKA'IKI

Petite Nomuka (population 550) was historically important because of its freshwater springs. The first European to arrive on the



FONUAFU'OU...NO FONUAFU'OU

From 1781 to 1865 there were repeated reports of a shoal 60km west of Nomuka. In 1877 smoke was seen rising from that spot and by 1885 a cinder, scoria and pumice island 50m high and 2km long had risen from the sea, spewed up in a violent sub-marine eruption.

In recognition of its birth, Tonga planted its flag on the island and claimed it for the king. It was named Fonuafo'ou – meaning 'New Land' (or Falcon Island as it was referred to by Europeans).

Then in 1894 Fonuafo'ou went missing. Less than two years later there appeared an island 320m high, which subsequently also disappeared. In 1927 it emerged again and by 1930 had risen in a series of fiery eruptions to 130m in height and 2.5km in length. By 1949 there was again no trace of Fonuafo'ou, which had once more been eroded by the sea.

Unless you're on a private yacht, the only way to catch a glimpse of Fonuafo'ou (if it's around when you're there!) is to ride one of the ferries returning to Tongatapu from Niuafu'ou, which normally pass within a few kilometres of it.

island was the Dutchman Abel Tasman, who named it Rotterdam while picking up water there. Subsequent well-known visitors included Captain James Cook, Captain William Bligh and William Mariner.

A large, brackish lake dominates much of Nomuka's hilly interior and the island is surrounded by raised coral formations up to 45m high. There are two smaller lakes near the island's northern end, one of which appears reddish orange from the air during dry periods, due to algae concentration. Nomuka's only accommodation is 'Eseta's Guesthouse (contact the Tongatapu TVB).

Numaka'iki, the companion island to Nomuka, has an old prison ruin and shipwreck to explore.

See p227 for details on organised kayaking and camping trips to the islands.

Access is normally by small boat from either Lifuka or Ha'afeva. However, the Free

Church of Tonga operates a boat that travels between Tongatapu, Nomuka and Lifuka (see p288). Sometimes it runs weekly, sometimes monthly.

Though it's not on their schedule, the inter-island ferries may occasionally stop in midwater near here, a fascinating sight when smaller boats come out to meet it.

TELEKIVAVA'U

If you've dreamed of having your own island paradise, this tiny island has the key ingredients – exclusivity, solitude, seclusion... and lots of languid luxury. Surrounded by a beautiful reef, **Villa Mamana** (toll free ☎ 86-VM-TONGA; www.villamamana.com; villa US\$1060) exclusively hosts one party of four adults at a time (children under 12 are free) on otherwise uninhabited Telekivava'u. Rates include boat transfers (from Tongatapu), meals, beverages and excursions, and satellite phone access.