

Tuvalu

In a stunning approach from the air, the islets of tiny Tuvalu appear like a mirage in the vastness of the Pacific. Barely higher than the surrounding ocean, and capped with a fringe of coconut palms, it's easy to understand why rising sea level due to global warming is a major concern here.

Time moves at its own pace on the five atolls and four islands of this sun-stunned nation. The weight of heat requires immediate retreat to the shade; it's impossible to move or even to think fast. Change down a gear, and enjoy the lack of hustle and bustle.

Formerly known as the Ellice Islands, the huge changes in Tuvalu over recent years are nowhere more evident than on Fongafale, the capital of Funafuti Atoll. Cars are overtaking bicycles and feet as the preferred form of transport, and an increasing population density and move away from subsistence traditions are bringing other challenges. Meanwhile, you can join the locals by taking a nap in the afternoon before a sunset float in the lagoon. If time is *really* no object, venture to the outer islands, where life is even more laid-back.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel and bird-watch in the gorgeous **Funafuti Conservation Area** (p742), with its uninhabited islets, seabird colonies and dolphins
- Relax on remote **Funafala islet** (p743) and get a taste of outer island lifestyle
- Float the sunset away in **Funafuti lagoon** (p741), surrounded by a classic coral atoll with a stunning aerial view
- Sway and stamp along to **fatele** (p737), Tuvalu's unique and very exciting music and dance performances

Funafuti ★

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Tuvalu has a tropical maritime climate: the temperature rarely ranges outside 28°C to 31°C. Rainfall is high, up to 3500mm in the south (including Funafuti), and is usually brief and heavy; the wettest season is November to February. From May to October winds are light and from the southeast (the trade winds), changing to west-northwest during the November to April 'cyclone season'. While Tuvalu is considered just outside the tropical cyclone belt, severe cyclones do occur occasionally.

HISTORY In the Beginning

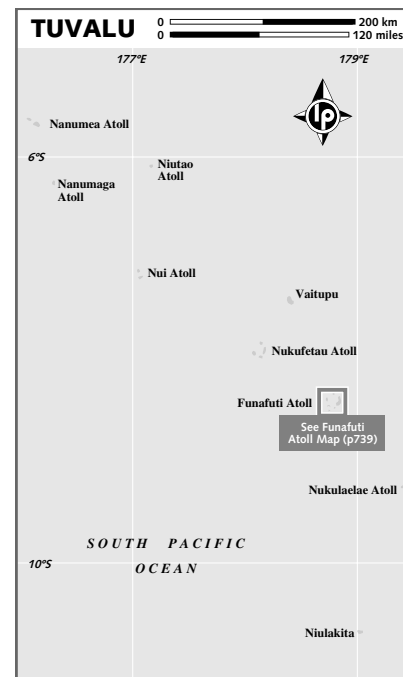
Tuvalu (too-*vah*-loo) means 'Cluster of Eight'. The *ninth* island, Niulakita, has been inhabited only in recent times. A proposal to rename the country Tuiva, 'Cluster of Nine', met a cool reception.

Polynesians settled Tuvalu around 2000 years ago, mostly from Samoa via Tokelau, but also from Tonga and Uvea (Wallis Island). The northern islands, especially Nui, were also settled by Micronesians from Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands).

Each hundred people or so were commanded by an *aliki*, a powerful chief. Under each *aliki* was a descending hierarchy in which everyone had their place. Each *sologa* (family) had a particular speciality or community responsibility – for example building, fishing, dancing or healing – and it was *tapu* (taboo) to leak this hereditary information to other families. Land was the most valuable asset and was passed down

TUVALU FACTS

- **Capital:** Funafuti Atoll; administrative centre Fongafale islet
- **Population:** 9500
- **Land area:** 26 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Nine
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 688
- **Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$)
- **Languages:** Tuvaluan, Gilbertese and English
- **Greeting:** *Talofa* (Tuvaluan)
- **Website:** www.timelesstuvalu.com



through the male side of the family, with communal lands set aside to support and maintain those in need.

Outside Influences

Spanish explorers sighted the islands in 1568, but the first European contact wasn't until 1781, when Spaniard Francisco Antonio Mourelle landed at Niutao. In 1819 an American explorer, De Peyster, arrived and named Funafuti 'Ellice's Island', after an English friend who was a politician.

In the 1820s whalers and other traders began to visit the islands, and traditional Tuvaluan society began to change with the introduction of alcohol, money and new tools and goods. The *mana* (power) of the *aliki* disappeared as people lost respect for their leaders' often drunk and disorderly behaviour. While most *palagi* (pah-lung-ee; Westerners) lived peacefully with the islanders, many earned a reputation of being dishonest and possessive. This opinion worsened in 1863 when 'blackbirders' (slavers) raided the southern islands for labourers for the Peruvian guano mines.

HOW THE ISLANDS FORMED

The Traditional Version

Tuvalu's islands were created by *Te Pusi* (The Eel) and *Te Ali* (The Flounder). Carrying home a heavy rock, a friendly competition of strength turned into a fight and *Te Pusi* used his magic powers to turn *Te Ali* flat, like the islands of Tuvalu, and made himself round like the coconut trees. *Te Pusi* threw the black, white and blue rock into the air – and there it stayed. With a magic spell it fell down but a blue part remained above to form the sky. *Te Pusi* threw it up again, and its black side faced down, forming night. With another spell the rock fell down on its white side and formed day. *Te Pusi* broke the rest of the rock into eight pieces, forming the eight islands of Tuvalu. With a final spell he threw the remaining pieces of blue stone and formed the sea.

The Scientific Version

After his Pacific voyages between 1835 and 1836, Charles Darwin proposed that coral atolls were built on slowly sinking volcanoes, while at the same time the crater edge was being built up by new deposits of coral. The subsidence theory explained why coral rock was found at depths far greater than the 40m at which coral polyps can survive (see p62). His theory was controversial at the time – others believed that reefs grew on underwater platforms raised by volcanic action.

Darwin proposed that a coral atoll be drilled for samples, and Tuvalu achieved scientific fame when the Royal Society of London funded expeditions to Funafuti. In 1898, after three 'boring' expeditions (see p741), scientists managed to obtain atoll core samples from 340m below the surface. When analysed, they showed traces of shallow water organisms, thus supporting Darwin's hypothesis. Not until 1952, on Enewetok in the Marshall Islands, was it possible to drill to a depth of 1290m (right through the coral structure) and actually reach volcanic rock.

They were aided by a resident Black American beachcomber, who coaxed the islanders on to the ship by promising knowledge of Christianity. The blackbirders succeeded in taking 250 people from Nukulaelae, and 171 from Funafuti; none returned.

Samoan missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS), who arrived in 1865, had even more impact on Tuvaluan culture. They ousted traditional religion while building on its influence, and began to dominate the *aliki* and take over their positions of authority and privilege. The Tuvaluan language was represented with Samoan orthography and sermons were delivered in Samoan. Use of the men's narrow, woven pandanus loincloth was suppressed. The quick, rhythmic dancing of the *fakanau* was banned by pastors, who regarded it as sexually stimulating and 'evil'. The custom of 'night creeping' – traditional nocturnal visits by courting males to their intended partner's house – was discouraged.

Colonialism

In 1886 the imperial powers of Britain and Germany divided up most of the western and central Pacific, each claiming a 'sphere

of influence'. Tuvalu fell within the British 'sphere', and in 1892 was incorporated into the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Protectorate. Thus Kiribati and Tuvalu (and later Tokelau), although ethnically and culturally different, were arbitrarily joined. Between 1900 and 1979 the British Phosphate Company (BPC) mine on Ocean Island (now Banaba, in today's Kiribati) employed an average of 200 Tuvaluans at any given time, on two-year work contracts. Others worked on the BPC phosphate mines in Nauru.

Laws imposed on the colony became increasingly strict and paternalistic. An authoritarian boarding school was established by DG Kennedy, a New Zealand (NZ) schoolteacher who arrived in 1923. He also introduced the *fusi* (cooperative stores) and radio, and served as district officer until 1939. In 1930 regulations were imposed on dancing, feasting, domestic animals and night fishing – even sleeping in an eating house attracted a fine.

WWII

During WWII Tuvaluan workers were trapped on Ocean Island and Nauru when the Japanese invaded. To prevent a Japanese

movement south to Tuvalu, US forces set up base on Funafuti and built airfields at Nukufetau and Nanumea in the north. More than 6000 Americans were based in Tuvalu, from where they bombed Japanese bases in the Gilberts, Nauru and the Marshall Islands.

The locals of Fongafale were shifted mostly to Funafala islet for the duration of the war. Funafuti was attacked nine times during 1943. Few people were killed, though there was one particularly lucky break on 23 April 1943, when many locals were persuaded by an American soldier to leave the shelter of the church, and go to the dugouts. Ten minutes later the church was blasted.

Postwar & Independence

Postwar changes were significant, with some islanders choosing to leave their overcrowded islands and use their war compensation money to migrate. People of Nanumaga shifted to Tonga and the Carolines; others moved from Vaitupu to Kioa in Fiji. The colony headquarters was set up at Tarawa in the Gilberts, and many Tuvaluans went there for work or study.

The union of the Gilbert and Ellice islands had always been a construct of British rule, and as the Gilberts' independence movement grew in the mid-1960s, Ellice Islanders, fearing that their more populous neighbours would have greater political clout, began agitating strongly for their own independence. In response to UN calls for decolonisation, the first House of Representatives was established in 1967. The Gilberts were allotted 18 seats, the Ellice Islands just five, but the Ellice Islanders retained a disproportionate hold on civil service positions.

In a 1974 referendum, Ellice Islanders voted overwhelmingly for separation from the Gilberts and in 1975, in preparation for independence, became a British dependency with its own government. Between 1975 and 1976 Ellice Islanders departed Tarawa en masse for their homeland; on 1 October 1978 the Ellice Islands became the independent nation of Tuvalu. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, represented by a governor general.

Aid money came flowing in, contributing to the hospital (1978), the deep-water wharf and cargo storage facilities (1981), and the hotel (1993). In 1987 Australia, NZ and the UK together contributed A\$24.7 million for

a Tuvalu Trust Fund. The country's trust fund has invested its nest egg wisely ('we don't want to be like Nauru', is a frequently heard warning), while hard-working seamen send their pay cheques home, and licences issued to the big Asian fishing fleets bring in another healthy stream of cash. And then there's dot tv.

Every country has a 'top level domain', the two letters which identifies it on the Internet. Even the US has one, although it's not generally used – a dot com is assumed to be in the US while a com.au is in Australia, a co.uk in the UK and so on. Lucky Tuvalu didn't get tu (Tunisia and Turkey were both in line ahead of it) – it got tv. In the late 1990s, when it was realised how much TV companies would pay for an address like CNN.tv or BBC.tv, the.tv Corp was set up and in 2002 it was sold to VeriSign for US\$45 million. Want to find out about Lonely Planet's TV plans? They're on www.lonelyplanet.tv.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

It's fair to say that most Tuvaluans are unlikely to suffer from stress. Life still revolves largely around family, friends, food and conversation; paid work is a necessary inconvenience, and the notion of efficient service in the hospitality industry hasn't quite caught on yet. Smiles are less evident than the local equivalent of eyebrows raised in greeting, so practice raising your own in return.

Many of the Tuvaluans who have travelled overseas for work or study have returned home; most are passionate about preserving island lifestyle and culture while still absorbing outside influences. Hence the trendy, shaven-headed young men playing footy or having a beer are just as comfortable sporting *fous*, the fresh headgarlands that many people wear as a matter of course, and dancing *fatele* (p737) in a *maneapa* (meeting house).

Lifestyle

Tuvaluans traditionally live in open *fale*, which have coral floors or raised wooden platforms. On Funafuti most homes are built in the Western style; these are less suited to the climate, but easier to maintain. People usually have little furniture apart from woven mats. Every few blocks there is a thatched *maneapa*, often used for song and dance

practice and card games, as well as for more formal community gatherings and church services; each of the outer island groups has its own *maneapa* in Funafuti. Protocol governs the *maneapa*; for example, no-one should walk in the inner circle, and the support poles have symbolic significance, with the sitting place at each reserved for important people. Sit barefooted and cross-legged, and avoid walking in front of people.

Women spend much of their time on handicrafts, especially weaving mats. When a *fale* is being built in the village, it is common for many women to contribute by preparing thatching material. Along the lagoon edge people swim, kids jetty-jump, and men walk in the water threading the fish they catch onto strings attached to floating coconut husks pulled behind them.

While much traditional culture has been retained, the family unit is being broken down as people are attracted to the cash economy on Funafuti. It is difficult to live by traditional subsistence fishing and agriculture in the high-density areas where housing is crowded, boundary disputes are common and squatter settlements are increasing. Stands of banana and *pulaka* (swamp taro) pits line the main road in the centre of the island, but these are small compensation for the 20 hectares of previously productive land now filled in by the airstrip. Most families eat significant amounts of starchy, sugary, fatty imported food, and alcohol consumption is on the rise, a diet which is reflected in growing rates of obesity and related illnesses such as diabetes. Average life expectancy remains relatively high though, with women living to 65, and men to 61.

One way to address these issues is by teaching people how to make informed decisions; education is highly valued, and schooling is heavily subsidised. The government high school is on Vaitupu, there is a church high school on Funafuti, and many Tuvaluans save or apply for scholarships to send their children on to further education elsewhere.

Population

Over 93% of the 9500 Tuvaluans registered in the last census are of Polynesian origin, and over 40% of them live on densely populated Funafuti, which currently has about 420 people per square kilometre over its

tiny land area. At the current growth rate of 1.7% per year, the population is expected to double in 40 years, and 36% are under the age of 15.

NZ has offered residence to Tuvalu's entire population in the event of catastrophic sea rise.

SPORT

If you get the chance, watch, or better still join in, a game of Tuvalu's unique sport, *te ano*. Almost completely incomprehensible to a first-timer, it's great fun and one of the few games that men and women play together.

To play *te ano* you need two round balls, about 12cm in diameter and woven from dried pandanus leaves. Two opposing teams face each other about 7m apart in five or six parallel rows of about six people, and nominate their *alovaka* (captain) and *tino pukepuke* (catcher), who stand in front of each team.

Team members hit the ball to each other with the aim of eventually reaching the catcher. Only the catcher can throw the ball back to the captain to hit back to the other team. To keep the game lively, two balls are used simultaneously. When either ball falls to the ground the other team scores a point, and the first to 10 points wins the game.

British journalist June Knox-Mawer visited Tuvalu in the 1960s and recorded her impressions of the game in *A South Seas Spell*:

Two teams of young men and women were playing a ballgame, facing each other like footballers. Back and forth whistled the ball, with the force of a cannon, hurled by the players to and fro as Amazonian figures leapt with outstretched hands to return it with a thwack, dark hair flying with outstretched hands to return it with a thwack, dark hair flying, muscular calves braced for the impact, or else jumped back to let it hurtle past. I was about to ask the system of scoring and so on, when Bwena remarked casually – 'The ball is a stone, you know, wrapped around with twine and a pandanus leaf.' After which I watched in open-mouthed silence...until victory was celebrated by 'our end' with a ribald send-up of a traditional dance.

'It was even more exciting in the days of our forefathers...the winning side would go mad. It was the proper thing for the sisters of the winning men to unfasten their skirts and wave them from side to side like flags, standing there naked before all the people [until]...the native missionaries from Samoa put a *tapu* on all competitive games.'

RELIGION

Church is the main event on Sunday, which is a day of rest. Most people (91% of the population) belong to the Protestant *Ekallesia Kelisiano o Tuvalu*, which is derived from the LMS. Seventh Day Adventists, Baha'i and Brethren Assembly each account for another 2% of the population, and there's a very small mosque for the tiny community of Muslim converts.

ARTS Dance

While 'twists' – discos – are the dances of choice for many young people, traditional dancing is still practiced and familiar to all, forming a central part of family and community events.

Handicrafts

Traditional handicrafts make imaginative use of limited materials. Pandanus mats (sleeping, floor and ceremonial) are highly valued. The creation of ceremonial mats is often competitive, producing imaginative, brightly coloured applied designs; sitting

mats take up to a week to make, while sleeping mats can take five to 10 weeks.

Handicrafts include ornamental stars, woven pandanus balls, model *fale* and canoes, shell necklaces, hairclaps, brightly coloured dancing skirts and woven fans of varied design. Utilitarian items include baskets and trays, carved fish hooks and coconut-fibre rope.

Hand-smocked *tibuta*, traditional women's tops from Kiribati, are made and sold by the local I-Kiribati population.

Literature

The Cruise of the Janet Nichol in the South Seas, by Fanny Stevenson (wife of Robert Louis Stevenson) includes her impressions of Tuvalu in 1890; difficult to locate in hard copy, you should be able to find excerpts on the Internet. *A South Seas Spell* (1975), by British journalist June Knox-Mawer, recounts the author's stay in the 1960s with Tuvaluans on Kioa, in Fiji, and Funafuti. *The People's Lawyer* (2000), by Philip Ells, is an amusing and thoughtful account of a young lawyer's two-year volunteer stint in Tuvalu. *Treasure Islands – Sailing the South Seas in the Wake of Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson* (2005) by Pamela Stephenson is more 'dear diary' than storytelling, but she visits and describes some of the less-visited outer islands.

The library on Funafuti has a decent Pacific collection, and a small treasure-trove of dusty books on Tuvalu. The oldest (and most fragile) of these is *Funafuti or Three Months on a Coral Atoll* (1899), by Caroline

FATELE

Describing a *fatele* as a session of community music, singing and dancing omits the most important element – its competitiveness. At opposite ends of the *maneapa* (meeting house), each village 'side' encircles a square wooden 'drum' on which the men pound a background beat backed by drumming on a metal cabin-cracker tin.

Singers, male and female, sit cross-legged around the drummers, who start gently and build, the tempo getting faster and faster, louder and louder until it peaks in a thumping, crashing crescendo. The singing follows suit, starting softly and harmoniously and building to a full throated melange of harmonies and counterharmonies. *Fatele* means 'to multiply', hinting at that steadily increasing speed.

To one side of the musicians and singers are the dancers, often a group of very substantial dames with flower *fous* wreathing their heads and brown grass skirts. An occasional male dancer jumps up to do a little warriorlike, bent-leg knee-knocking, but essentially it's left to the women to sway statuesquely, only varying their dance with a graceful little 'so beat that' swirl at the end.

The other side tries too.

Martha Edgeworth David, wife of the scientist who proved Darwin's theory of atoll formation on Funafuti (see the boxed text, p734); it's of its colonial time, but her personal battle coming to terms with a strange environment and culture will ring a bell with many readers.

LANGUAGE

English is widely spoken. Tuvaluan is a Polynesian language related to Tokelauan. Tuvaluan uses 'l' where some Polynesian languages use 'r', so the name for a chief (*ariki* in the Cook Islands) is *aliki* in Tuvalu. When missionaries put the language into written form they used Samoan orthography so, as in Samoa, the letter 'g' is used for the soft 'ng' sound.

Tuvaluan basics

Hello.	<i>Talofa.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Tofa.</i>
How are you?	<i>E a koe?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Malosi.</i>
Please.	<i>Fakamolemole.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Fakafeteki.</i>
Yes.	<i>Io or Ao</i>
No.	<i>Ikai.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Geography

Tuvalu's five coral atolls and four islands spread over 800km of ocean. Funafuti, the capital, is about 1100km north of Fiji, and the northern islands are about 250km south of Kiribati. With a total land area of only 26 sq km, Tuvalu is one of the world's smallest countries; the highest land is a mere 5m above sea level.

Ecology

Tuvalu's infertile atoll soils support coconut palms, pandanus, salt-tolerant ferns and some atoll scrub. Mangrove areas are rare. There are about 50 endemic plant species, and cultivated plants include banana, taro and breadfruit. Vegetation has an important role in foreshore protection but degradation is quite severe. Large tree species traditionally used for canoes and building are becoming rare.

Marine life is diverse, with dolphins and manta rays commonly seen in Funafuti lagoon. Green turtles breed in Tuvalu, and

hawksbills and leatherbacks are sometimes seen. There are breeding colonies of seabirds in the conservation area (p742), and in town you'll see fairy terns hovering low on the shoreline, and some waders at the water's edge. Dick Watling's *Guide to the Birds of Fiji & Western Polynesia* includes the 35 species seen on Tuvalu. There are no native land mammals, but rats, dogs, cats and pigs have been introduced as has the ubiquitous cane toad. Noddy birds are still hunted for food on the outer islands, though all wildlife within the conservation area is protected.

As an atoll nation, the major long-term ecological threat to Tuvalu comes from global warming (see p66) and rising sea level, but population pressures and changing lifestyles are more immediate problems.

About 4500 people are squeezed onto Funafuti's long, skinny 2.8 sq km Fongafale islet. Only about a third of the islet is habitable: large areas are taken up by the airfield and by enormous 'borrow pits', where material was excavated or 'borrowed' for its construction during WWII.

The most obvious environmental problem is the lack of garbage disposal. While traditional throw-away attitudes remain, there is an increasing dependence on imported packaged food. On a place this tiny, almost every tin can and piece of plastic ends up in the borrow pits.

Solutions are being tried. One possibility, for example, is that the borrow pits become landfill areas, with garbage compressed into them, some type of toxic guard-layer laid on top, and sand and soil dumped on top of that. (A vocal group of locals think that perhaps the Americans should help with this, and return the land they 'borrowed' during the war.) A can-crushing machine is operating on the island, and a small sum is paid for each can collected; hopefully these, and other scrap metal and battery waste, will eventually be bought by overseas recycling operations. On a smaller scale, sustainable community waste management is being promoted, with locals encouraged to compost what they can and to start gardening in an attempt to reduce dependence on packaged foods. As a visitor, you can help by arriving with as little plastic as possible, taking it out again with you when you go, and minimising your throw-away rubbish while in-country.

Trouble in Paradise, an international documentary made in 2004, provides a good overview of the environmental issues facing Tuvalu and local people's responses to them, as does locally made *Te Malosiga O Fenua: The Strength of the Island*. You can find the first at Motolalu Internet café, and the second at the Department of Community Services, both in Fongafale.

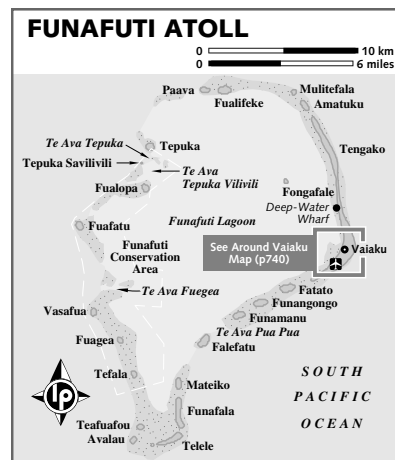
FUNAFUTI ATOLL

pop 4500 / area 2.8 sq km

Funafuti (foo-nah-foo-ti) Atoll is the country's capital, with the administrative centre and airport on Fongafale islet. The vast lagoon, about 24km long and 18km wide, has two small and two large *te ava* (reef passages). Pretty Funafala islet at the southern end of the atoll has simple accommodation, and the pristine marine conservation area on the western side is simply spectacular.

ORIENTATION

Fongafale (also spelt Fogafale or Fagafale) is the largest of Funafuti's islets. It's a long snakelike slither of land, 12km long and between 10m and 400m wide, with the South Pacific Ocean on the east and the protected lagoon on the west. The airstrip runs from northeast to southwest on the widest part of the island, with the village and administrative centre of Vaiaku on the lagoon side. The deep-water wharf is 1.7km north of the



hospital; the main road continues north and at times is almost half the islet's width!

INFORMATION

The following are all located in Vaiaku.

Internet Access

Motolalu Internet Café (Ground fl, Telecom Bldg)

Media

Department of Community Affairs (☎ 20815; Ministry of Home Affairs, Government Offices) Produces local documentaries.

Media Centre (☎ 20138; opposite Vaiaku Lagi Hotel) Publishes the monthly newsletter and broadcasts Radio Tuvalu.

Medical Services

Princess Margaret Hospital (☎ 20480, 20749) At the northern end of town. The pharmacy may not have a wide selection of drugs, so bring any medical supplies you need.

Money

National Bank of Tuvalu (NBT; ☎ 20803; 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri) Opposite airport building.

Post

The post office is on the ground floor of the government offices.

Tourist Information

Tuvalu receives few tourists – in a recent year only 154 visitors identified themselves as tourists.

Funafuti Town Council (Kaupule Funafuti; ☎ 20846, 20630) Arranges boats to the conservation area.

Government tourism officer (☎ 20408; fax 20210; www.timelesstuvalu.com; secfin@tuvalu.tv; Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning & Industries, top fl, Government Offices)

Lands & Survey Department (☎ 20836; 1st fl, Government Offices) Has detailed maps of Funafuti and the outer islands.

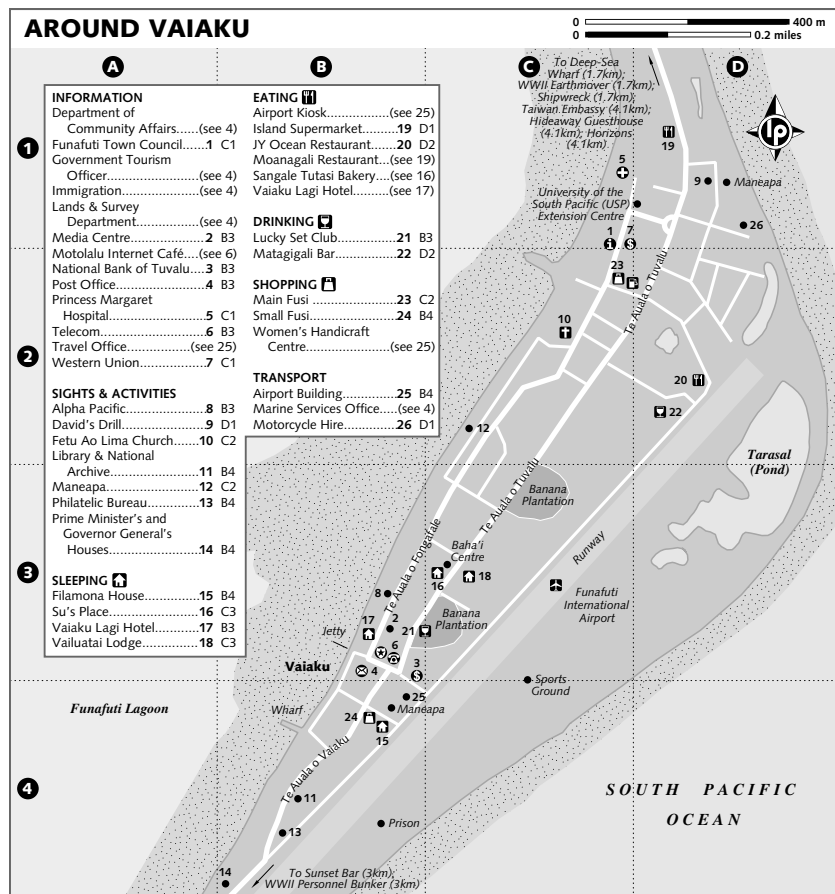
Travel Agencies

Travel Office (☎ 20737; fax 20757) At the airport; deals with ticketing and reconfirmation of flights.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

AIR
Funafuti International Airport's small wooden airport building was built in 1993 with Australian and EU aid. Air Fiji has regular flights between Suva and Funafuti (see p749).



There are no domestic flights between Funafuti and the outer islands.

BOAT

Funafuti lagoon has two reef passages that are large enough for ships to enter, and it also has a deep-water wharf north of Vaiaku. The cargo and passenger ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* make occasional voyages to Fiji. For further information, see p749.

Getting Around

You'll find that it's often too hot to walk further than around Vaiaku; motorcycles are the easiest option for getting around Fongafale.

BICYCLE

The motorcycle rental places may have the odd bicycle for hire, or ask at your accommodation.

BOAT

The easiest way to see the lagoon and some of the smaller islets is with the Funafuti Town Council (see p739). The council's boat costs around A\$100 for several hours, or negotiate with locals yourself. Don't expect life jackets or safety gear!

BUS

Fongafale's minibus service (40c for the length of the town) is more like a mobile disco! The service runs from about 6.30am

to 7pm (only on Sunday for church). There are weekday buses to the northern end of the island (60c), early in the morning and at about 4pm to coincide with school hours.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Cars are not generally available for hire, though you might be able to work something out informally. Motorcycles and mopeds are the most popular transport and are available for hire (A\$10 per day) from a place near David's Drill (see right); alternatively, ask around privately. Look out for the one wildly decorated (private) Filipino jeepney that careens around town!

TAXI

Taxis costs around A\$4 from the hotel to the deep-water wharf, and A\$2 from the hotel to the southern end of the islet near the governor general's residence. There are many private taxi operators; ask at your accommodation.

FONGAFALE ISLET Sights & Activities

Wander around town, borrow a bicycle or hire a moped to explore the islet, and don't expect much action in the streets during the hot hours of midday.

The **airstrip** is literally and figuratively the centre of island life; taking a walk, jog or bike ride at dawn and dusk is a must. On hot, still nights the runway resembles the massacre of the innocents as families decamp to sleep in the open. Sprawled motionless in haphazard groups, the scene gradually comes to life at first light when people carry sleeping mats, pillows and small children back to their houses. Late afternoons the runway is action-packed, with small groups of (mostly) men playing a variety of ball games, weightlifting or running, with walkers marching the perimeter, and cyclists zipping up and down between. It's also fun to hang around the fringes of the airport building at flight arrival times, with the fire engine sounding its siren to clear the runway, the food stalls beside, and locals farewelling and garlanding friends and family.

Towards the southern end of the runway are the neighbouring **prime minister's and governor general's houses**. In the garden of the GG's house is a carefully conserved

massive old structure looking a bit like a brick kiln; unsure exactly what it was used for, the general opinion is that it was maybe an early aircraft beacon. From the road you can see a very beautiful traditionally built **maneapa** on the lagoon side of the compound garden, the only one remaining on Fongafale; ask someone for permission to go closer and check out its intricate construction and thatching.

The tiny and book-stuffed **library and national archive** (☎ 20128; ☎ 8am-12.30 & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) holds an impressive Pacific collection and a small selection of works on Tuvalu; it's an air-conditioned and pleasant space to spend a couple of hours browsing. Next door is the **philatelic bureau** (☎ 20224; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri), which as well as displaying collectors' stamps sells a few postcards and (regular) postage stamps for them.

The vast **Funafuti lagoon** is stunning; floating in the lagoon's turquoise waters is a great way to start and end a scorching day, and it's clean enough. The concrete jetty just south of Vaiaku Lagi Hotel is a good spot to enter; there's no live coral near shore, but there are plenty of small, pretty reef fish hanging around. Women should swim in long shorts and T-shirts, and men in long shorts. You may be able to hire **kayaks**; try calling ☎ 20200 or 20777.

In 1896 the first of three coral-drilling expeditions came to Funafuti to investigate Darwin's theory of atoll formation (see p734). Led by Australian Professor Edgeworth David, the expedition site known as **David's Drill** is at the northern end of town. It's commemorated by a concrete base, decorated with shells and an inscription, surrounding the drill hole; a small and unassuming memorial to the world's first scientific step towards proving how atolls are formed. His wife's diary, published in 1899, is in the library.

There are a few WWII remnants on Fongafale. Almost hidden under salt bush towards the southern end of the islet is an old **personnel bunker**, and near the deep-water wharf an enormous **earth-moving machine**, still bearing its American maker's plate, is quietly rusting away. The **wreck** on the lagoon shore beyond the wharf is a fishing boat, destroyed during Cyclone Bebe in 1972.

FONGAFALE BY BICYCLE Heading South

Take the airport building as your start point and head south along the runway road. Stop at the **prime minister's and governor general's houses** (p741); with luck, someone will invite you to look at the grounds. Continue straight down the road, enjoy the domestic scenes in the households you pass, and imagine the island before the eyesore 'borrow pits' existed. At the end of the road – perhaps 3km from the airport – follow the bush track and emerge at the end of Fongafale, where ocean and lagoon meet. Heading back, stop at the **Sunset Bar** (p382) for a cold drink; if it looks closed, go around the back and ask.

Returning, veer left off the runway road onto Vaiaku Rd; pass the **philatelic bureau** (p741) and cool off in the **library** (p741). Stay on this road back to the airport.

Heading North

From the airport, cycle past **Vaiaku Lagi Hotel** (opposite). Continue along this road and note Fetu Ao Lima church, rebuilt on the site of the church destroyed in WWII. Passing the area around the *fusi* and hospital, you'll end up on the main (and only) road heading north. Look out for the massive WWII **earth-mover** (p741) on the right side of the road, check out the action at the deep-water wharf (chaotic if a boat's arriving or departing), and the **wreck** (p741) in the lagoon.

Beyond the wharf you can cycle on for another 4km or so to the northern end of Fongafale; this is where the scheme to landfill the borrow pits is being tried. You'll pass quiet households, a couple of guesthouses

and beach picnic spots, and can collapse gratefully at **Horizons** (p744) beach bar or at the kiosk beside the secondary school for a drink.

On the way home, turn left after the Island Supermarket and at the bend on the road, opposite a *maneapa*, is **David's Drill** (p741) site at ground level. Weave your way back to the *fusi* if you need to shop, or head over to the end of the runway for refreshment and a sit-down at **Jimmy's** (JY Ocean Restaurant, p744).

AROUND FUNAFUTI

Try to make time to visit the gorgeous Funafuti Conservation Area (below), about a half-hour motorboat ride across the lagoon. If you book through the town council, it will cost you a flat fee of A\$100 for a return boat trip (maximum 12 people), including time on one or two of the islets. The length of time you'll be out, and where you'll go, largely depends on the weather. There's an A\$50 fee per person for those taking photographs; commercial photographers pay more. This may seem expensive, but it's about the only revenue the conservation area gets, and it needs it. Safety equipment on the boat is likely to be limited or non-existent, and you'll need to take your own snorkel gear; there is no diving.

Just outside the northern boundary of the conservation area is **Tepuka islet**. There's good snorkelling at its southern end, decent beaches and some WWII relics in the centre (you'll need directions to find them). Ask around for private boat operators to take you out there (try Eti at the Alpha Pacific

office near the Media Centre; ☎ 20900); you'll pay around A\$80 for a return trip.

Beautiful **Funafala islet** is at the southern end of the atoll. When the Americans took over Fongafale in WWII, the villagers were relocated here; most moved back after the war, but there is still a small community here. It is a lovely, remote place, and the more traditional village lifestyle gives a taste of what the outer islands are like. Funafala is about one hour by boat from Vaiaku (see p740); the town council's boat will cost A\$100 return but double this if you're staying overnight (see right), as it will have to make two return trips.

Amatuku islet is about 10km north of Vaiaku. A boys' mission school was started here in the late 1890s, before being transferred to Vaitupu. The Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute was established here in 1979, relatively isolated in order to simulate ship operations. About 60 Tuvaluans train as seamen each year, and have a good reputation with international shipping companies. Most send their wages back to their families, and their remittances are an important part of Tuvalu's economy.

SLEEPING

There's a small but adequate selection of accommodation on Fongafale that includes a hotel, a lodge and several family-run guesthouses. There's also a basic guesthouse on Funafala islet.

Filamona House (☎ 20983; s/d incl breakfast A\$60/70; 🚻) Conveniently located across from the Vaiaku *maneapa* by the airport. This family-run lodge has two small, dark rooms downstairs and three upstairs, one of which can become a three-bed 'dormitory' for A\$45 per person. There's a communal lounge, basic kitchen and a veranda upstairs overlooking the runway.

Family guesthouses can be a more economical option although sometimes room availability depends on whether family are visiting, and quality often dips if owners are overseas. Staying at a guesthouse will give you a better idea of how local people live, and a better sense of Tuvalu's traditions of neighbourliness and extended family. You'll probably also need to put aside any need you might have for privacy, and to be prepared for noisy and hot nights! Expect to pay around A\$40 for a single room with fan,

shared bathroom and kitchen. In town try Su's Place and Vailuatai Lodge; ask locally for other possibilities.

Hideaway Guesthouse (☎ 20365; tufha@tuvalu.tv; s/d with fan A\$33/44, apt A\$55; 🚻) Out of town, this three-room guesthouse is one of several places towards the northern end of Fongafale. It's a bit rundown, but the family is friendly, the apartment is a good size and has cooking facilities, and there are two basic fan-cooled rooms with bathrooms. There are regular minibuses to the deep-water wharf, from where it's 2.5km (about a half-hour walk) to the guesthouse; on weekdays there is a morning and late afternoon bus service to the door. There's no sign, so look for the fence and satellite dish of the Taiwanese ambassador's house. The guesthouse is next door.

Continuing to head north, other options are three air-conditioned rooms in a two-storey house opposite Horizons bar (ask there for information), and two simple beach houses on the lagoon at the northern end of the island (ask about these at the Funafuti Town Council).

Funafala Islet Guesthouse (Funafala; beds A\$15) This tiny fibro place has two beds, louvre windows and solar electricity, but no mosquito screens. It's next to a *maneapa* on the water's edge and has a toilet block and water tank. Take your own food (as there are no shops) and a good read. You'll need to book in person and pay in advance at Funafuti Town Council.

EATING

Vaiaku Lagi Hotel (meals A\$3-6; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner). Go for the fresh fish options here. The food is fine, but you'll be looking forward

FUNAFUTI CONSERVATION AREA

If you've ever indulged in a desert-island fantasy, now's your chance to visit one for real. The five islets of the Funafuti Conservation Area are strung in a necklace along the western side of the atoll; all are uninhabited and – with the consent of the landowners – are protected as no fishing, no hunting, no gathering areas. The islets, varying in size from small to tiny, are fringed with white sand, sport a dense cluster of native forest and palm trees and are alive with the noise and activity of colonies of seabirds; one of the joys of stepping ashore is finding yourself eyeball to eyeball with an exquisite and curious fairy tern hovering in front of you. Green turtles nest on the beaches, and while much of the coral close to shore has suffered from bleaching, it still provides a home for many species of brilliantly coloured reef fish. Until 2005 there were six islets, but an exceptional storm and surge destroyed tiny Tepuka Savilivili, giving an unsettling taste of what might happen to Tuvalu as global warming progresses.

The conservation area, initiated in 1996, covers 33 sq km of lagoon, reef, channel, ocean and island habitats. It's open to visitors for snorkelling, walking, picnicking and bird-watching.

to some variety after a few days. Vegetarians can expect to live on the omelette option; if you don't eat eggs, bring your own food. You can eat at the edge of the lagoon, and it's a lovely spot to relax.

JY Ocean Restaurant (meals A\$4-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) An old favourite, Kai Restaurant has moved location and changed its name to JY Ocean Restaurant, but is known locally to everyone as 'Jimmy's'. It's now on the corner at the northern end of the runway in a cool setting that gets the ocean breeze, and remains a popular gathering place for a wide range of Chinese-style food and cold beer and wine.

Moanagali Restaurant (meals from A\$3) Beside the Island Supermarket. The Chinese cook prepares good simple food to order; the fresh fish soup (ask for an addition of seaweed) is delicious. The setting's hot and uninviting and you won't want to linger, but many locals reckon it's the best food in town. There are several other rice and noodle places dotted around.

Airport Kiosk (Airport Bldg; sandwiches A\$2, toddy 50c) Serves great sandwiches, with coleslaw and salad adding to the fillings; vegos will need to go for the omelette burger option. Try their cold fresh (nonalcoholic) toddy as a refreshing drink. You can often buy roti – a Tuvaluan version of the popular Fijian snack of filled Indian bread – from the kiosk or from roadside sellers by the airport.

Sangale Tutasi Bakery, just north of the airport, makes good bread.

Food in general – and fresh food in particular – can be pretty scarce if the supply boat has been delayed; bring a stash of goodies if there's anything you can't do without, and be prepared to lower your intake of vitamins and roughage for the duration.

DRINKING

Nightlife in Funafuti happens Thursday to Saturday, with loud and wildly popular 'twists' (discos) taking place at the raucous **Matagigali Bar** (☺ 8pm till late) and **Lucky Set Club** (☺ 8pm till late). Tuvaluans enjoy a beer or several, and – like anywhere – an aggressive drunk is not a pretty sight; women visitors should think twice about going out alone, and it's wise to avoid figure-hugging clothes.

Out of town, Sunset Bar and Horizons, at the southern and northern ends of the island

respectively, are local drinking haunts and good for a sundowner if you're passing by.

SHOPPING

Fongafale has few shops.

Women's Handicraft Centre (Airport Bldg; ☺ 8am-noon & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri & for flights) This place sometimes only has shell necklaces and cane baskets, but occasionally it stocks good-quality items of traditional design in natural materials.

Local craftswomen also have stalls set up near the Funafuti airport and sell brightly coloured, less labour-intensive items made especially for Tuvalu's small number of travellers; these are made with bright plastic yarn and shells. Departing loved ones or important guests are laden with farewell necklaces. See p737 for more on handicrafts.

The *fusis*, or island cooperative stores, sell a selection of basic groceries and, if a ship's been in recently, a few cold-stored vegetables.

OUTER ISLANDS

Tuvalu's remote outer islands and atolls are beautiful and pristine; they also have very little infrastructure for visitors, and are only accessible by the government supply ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* (see p749). The boats do a round trip lasting several days to each of the three island groups – Nanumea, Niutao, Nanumaga and Nui (Northern), Vaitupu, Nukufetau and Fongafale (Central), and Nukulaelae and Niulakita (Southern) – calling in at each island for the best part of a day to unload and load supplies and passengers. This means if you're prepared to spend a few nights on board ship for the duration of the trip, you can spend the days exploring the outer islands. If you choose to get off the boat and plan to stay, be warned; it might be some weeks before the next transport arrives! Give advance warning of your arrival and come prepared to be pretty much self-sufficient.

NUKUFETAU ATOLL

pop 590 / area 3 sq km

This atoll is the closest to Funafuti, about 100km to the northwest. Locally known as 'the island of the civil servants', because so many government workers come from here, it is also known for the (literally)

MAROONED IN TUVALU *Tony Wheeler*

It's comparatively easy to fly to Funafuti, the main island of the Tuvalu group, but very few visitors get any further. The passenger-cargo ship *Nivaga II* which runs around the islands is irregular and unreliable (quite apart from being bloody uncomfortable), and yachties, who might be tempted to drop by some of the islands, are put off by the poor anchorages. In two visits to Tuvalu I managed to visit eight of the nine islands, although along the way there was a spell as a castaway and the prime minister died.

Photographer Peter Bennetts was the catalyst for this misadventure. Concerned about the dangers of global warming and rising sea levels, he'd convinced the Tuvaluan government to support a project to produce a photographic book about the islands and the dangers they faced. He convinced me to come along to write the text. The government's role was transport: we would go along on the patrol boat *Te Mataili*, which would drop us off at various islands on the group. In Funafuti Peter and I met the prime minister, Ionatana Ionatana, and we signed the contract for Lonely Planet to produce the book which eventually emerged as *Time & Tide*. The next day we sailed south to Nukulaelae and that evening the prime minister had a heart attack and dropped dead. It set the tone for the whole project because back in Funafuti bad weather set in, the patrol ship couldn't leave base and after a few days of hanging around Peter and I retreated to Australia.

A couple of months later we returned to Funafuti for a second try, but this time the patrol boat wasn't available. We hitched a ride on the government fishing boat *Manau* which took us to Vaitupu along with a film crew from *National Geographic*. A couple of days later the *Manau* landed us at Nukufetau then continued to Funafuti to drop the film crew off, promising to return to pick us up 48 hours later. It didn't. The fishing boat, it transpired, had suffered some sort of major mechanical failure which, doubly unfortunately, coincided with a major electronic failure in the phone connection with Nukufetau. Day after day passed while we pondered what an extended stay in the small settlement would be like. 'Don't worry,' the islanders counselled, 'the *Nivaga II* usually drops by every three months. If it hasn't broken down and got stuck in Fiji for six months.'

Fortunately we didn't have to wait that long, a week later the patrol boat was patrolling again, picked us up and took us to all but one of the other islands. I'm not planning a return trip to tick Nui, the missing island, off my list.

fast-talking locals. It's possible that this, rather than Funafuti, was the atoll visited by RL Stevenson in 1890; Fanny Stevenson's diary of the trip on the *Janet Nichol* mentions navigation problems and also talks of meeting Restieaux, a European trader known to have lived on Nukufetau, not Funafuti, at the time.

During WWII large cargo ships and warships anchored in the lagoon, and two runways were built on Motulalo islet; if Tuvalu ever needs to increase its airport capacity, this will be the place to do it. The shattered remnants of a B24 Liberator bomber can be found among the palm trees, some distance north of the main runway. The island started the first primary school in Tuvalu, and the annual Founding Day on 11 February is celebrated with gusto.

The **council guesthouse** (☎ 36005) is right beside the primary school and has two bedrooms.

VAITUPU

pop 1590 / area 5.6 sq km

Vaitupu Island has the largest land area in Tuvalu; even so, in 1947, some families migrated from the overcrowded island to the island of Kioa in Fiji.

Motufoua, the first of Tuvalu's two secondary schools, is located here and there are over 600 boarders between the ages of 13 and 21. In March 2000 a terrible dormitory fire killed 18 teenage girls and their warden (the dormitory doors were locked and windows barred). *Vaitupu – An Account of Life on a Remote Polynesian Atoll* (1999), by John Chalkley, is an illustrated memoir of the author's time teaching on Vaitupu in the 1970s; you'll find it in the library on Fongafale.

You can walk almost all the way around the densely vegetated island, wading across the shallow entrances to the two lagoons at low tide. Just south of the harbour in the

village are the foundations of early trader Heinrich Nitz's house. His gravestone (the actual grave is further along the road) reveals that he was born in Stralsund, Germany, in 1839 and died on Vaitupu in 1906. Many islanders are descendants of Nitz. Continue around the southern end of the island, past the school; a small track directly opposite Te Motu Olepa islet leads a short way inland to a large horizontal slab just to the right (north) of the path. It was probably part of a pre-Christian site with good sunrise views but it's hard to find without local help. Continue along the coast past Elisefou agricultural station (presently sadly defunct) and the entrance to the larger lagoon to reach a shipwreck at the entrance to the smaller northern lagoon. The Solomon Islands ship *Sisco* ran onto the reef in 1981 and sat there relatively intact until the late '90s when it disintegrated.

The **council guesthouse** (☎ 30005) is behind the church and *maneapa*, close to the harbour. You can get meals here and the quantities are huge. The *fusi* is right by the harbour.

The Funafuti–Vaitupu boat trip takes eight or nine hours. Passengers are transferred to a small boat and shuttled into the harbour, which is too small for larger boats.

NUI ATOLL

pop 550 / area 2.8 sq km

Nui Atoll has 11 main islets along the eastern side of its lagoon. There are several coconut-fringed, white-sand **beaches**, and at low tide it is possible to walk between islets. Kiribati is also spoken here as some of the people are of Micronesian descent. Contact the **local island council** (☎ 23005) if you want to stay at the guesthouse.

NANUMAGA ATOLL

pop 590 / area 2.8 sq km

Nanumaga (nah-noo-mah-nga) is oval-shaped with two landlocked lagoons and a narrow fringing reef. The northern lagoon has a legendary giant's footprint while the southern one has some impressively fearless fish; catching them is not allowed. The two island sides, Tonga and Tokelau, reflect the islanders' origins and are further subdivided into five clans. Respect for the elders suffered in 1979 when they spent almost all of the atoll's funds purchasing

poor land in Texas! Contact the **island council** (☎ 33005) about their **guesthouse** (r \$40), which is pricey.

NIUTAO ATOLL

pop 660 / area 2.5 sq km

In 1949 Niutao acquired the island of Niulakita in the country's south, and families were settled there to relieve overpopulation on this small home atoll. The people, known for their traditional handicrafts, retain some traditional beliefs, and until 1982 they had among them a woman who had inherited the power to make rain. Niutao has a **council guesthouse** (☎ 28005).

NANUMEA ATOLL

pop 660 / area 3.9 sq km

Nanumea is Tuvalu's northernmost atoll and the closest to Kiribati. It is also one of the most beautiful, with a **fresh-water pond** (unusual for atolls) and a large **church** with a tall steeple and stained-glass windows. It suffered several Japanese attacks during WWII. Plane **wrecks** and a wrecked cargo ship near the main settlement serve as reminders. The old runway took up one-sixth of the land area, and its construction involved felling almost half of the existing coconut trees. The Americans also blasted a passage in the reef and the lagoon is now a sheltered **anchorage** for yachts. Contact the **island council** (☎ 26005) about the guesthouse.

NUKULAEAE ATOLL

pop 400 / area 1.8 sq km

This atoll has two main islets, Niuku and Tumuiloto, on the eastern side of the lagoon, but the population is all on Fangaua on the western side. Nukulaeae is about 120km southeast of Funafuti and is Tuvalu's easternmost atoll. In 1863 two-thirds of its population was kidnapped by blackbirders and forced to work as slaves in Peruvian mines. Today, the people from Nukulaeae have a reputation for their dancing and singing, and have sent local dancers to the Marshall Islands to perform and to record a CD.

There is a pre-Christian **archaeological site** of small standing-stone 'platforms' about halfway along Niuku. It's known as a *faleatau* (house of God), and bears similarities to others in eastern Polynesia. Near the southern end of Tumuiloto, a memorial and a small chapel marks the shipwreck arrival site

of Elekana, the Cook Islander credited with introducing Christianity to Tuvalu.

Visitors can stay at the island council **guesthouse** (☎ 35005). There are no channels into the lagoon and transfers ashore from larger ships can be tricky.

NIULAKITA

pop 35 / area 0.4 sq km

Tuvalu's ninth and most southern landmass is the tiny coral island of Niulakita. It is at a little higher elevation than the other islands, with fertile soils and lush vegetation. It has white-sand **beaches** within a closed-ring reef, and a pretty church. Niulakita was not considered part of the eight islands of old Tuvalu, as it never had a permanent population. It had various foreign 'owners' and in the late 19th century was exploited for its guano; later, it was a copra plantation. In 1949 it was taken over by the people of Niutao, and now supports a shifting population of families from Niutao who stay for a year or two and are then replaced by others.

There is no guesthouse but you could try to arrange to stay with one of the local families; contact the **island council** (☎ 21022). A small channel has been blasted in the surrounding reef to allow access to the beach, but it's usually a hairy ride in through the waves.

TUVALU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Funafuti has one fairly ordinary hotel, one lodge, and some less expensive guesthouses. Most of the outer islands have basic council guesthouses. Tax is included in the room rates given in this chapter.

ACTIVITIES

Once in Tuvalu, you have no option but to get into the slow swing of things, since there isn't much to do, and no reason to hurry! You can walk, bike, snorkel (take your own gear) and swim, but there's no diving. (See also p741.)

BOOKS

The books mentioned below are in the library on Fongafale, but may be hard to find elsewhere.

PRACTICALITIES

- The Media Centre on Funafuti publishes *Tuvalu Echoes*, a monthly national newsletter in English and Tuvaluan.
- Radio Tuvalu on FM 94.8 has several daily programmes in Tuvaluan, with fill-in from the BBC World Service and Radio Australia. In 2005 there was no TV but there has been, and may be again!
- Appliances run on Australian-style plugs with three flat pins.
- Tuvalu uses the metric system (see the Quick Reference page for conversions).

The Material Culture of Tuvalu (1961), by Gerd Koch, concentrates on the islands of Niutao and Nanumaga. *Tuvalu, A History* (1983) was written by a team of Tuvaluan and provides an interesting local view of colonial and WWII history. *Strategic Atolls, Tuvalu and the Second World War* (1994), by Peter McQuarrie, is a good account, with photographs, of the islands in WWII.

Time & Tide: The Islands of Tuvalu (2001), by Peter Bennetts and Tony Wheeler, is a Lonely Planet photographic book about the islands.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open weekdays 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4pm. It's probably best not to make appointments between noon and 2pm. Government offices, NGOs and banks close on public holidays (see p829 for a list of public holidays in the Pacific), but not all places do. You'll usually find at least one place to eat, and even *fusi* open on Sunday after church.

CHILDREN

Children are welcome in Tuvalu as they are in all Pacific countries. Child-specific activities and entertainment are scarce, so be prepared to make your own or to join in locally with, for example, dance or singing practice.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Tuvaluan Embassies & Consulates

Tuvalu's diplomatic representation abroad consists of one embassy: **Fiji** (☎ 679-330 1355; fax 679-330 1023; 16 Gorrie St, PO Box 14449, Suva).

Embassies & Consulates in Tuvalu

The only overseas embassy in Tuvalu is that of the **People's Republic of China** (Taiwan; ☎ 20278). Other major nations that have a South Pacific interest handle Tuvalu from their embassy in Suva in Fiji (see p211 for further information).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In addition to New Year's, Easter, Christmas and Boxing Day (see p829), Tuvalu celebrates:

Funafuti Youth Day 11 February

Commonwealth Day March

Bomb Day (Japanese bombing Funafuti) 23 April

Gospel Day Second Monday in May

Queen's Birthday Early June

Children's Day Early August

Independence Day Early October

Hurricane Day (1972 Cyclone Bebe) 21 October

Prince Charles' Birthday Early November

These days generally involve some sort of ceremonial and church service, followed by evening sports and dancing.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are three Internet cafés in Funafuti. When the national server is working the service is good, but the system can be down for weeks if there's a problem. If you're emailing someone in Tuvalu and getting no response, just keep trying.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Jane's Oceania Pages (www.janeresture.com) A wide-ranging and interesting website about Oceania, with links to specific countries. It's maintained by Jane Resture, descendant of one of the earliest traders and settlers in Tuvalu.

Timeless Tuvalu (www.timelesstuvalu.com) This government-run site has information and links for visitors.

Tuvalu Online (www.tuvaluislands.com) An excellent site with interesting links. It is produced by a Canadian/Tuvaluan family, and has photos, news headlines and general information about the country.

Tuvalu Overview (www.tuvalu.site.ne.jp) The website of a Japanese NGO that runs small-group ecotours to Tuvalu. The auto-translate is somewhat wacky – 'Tuvalu' translates as 'brim Lu', for example – but Japanese speakers will find it useful.

MONEY

Australian currency is the legal tender, but there are also Tuvaluan 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c and \$1 coins. You're strongly advised to take

HOW MUCH?

- **Apple:** A\$1.50
- **Postcard:** A\$1
- **Basic mask and snorkel:** A\$25
- **500g pack spaghetti:** A\$3
- **Plain shell necklace:** A\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1.5L drinking water:** A\$2
- **1L petrol:** A\$1.35
- **Can VB beer:** A\$1.75
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** A\$17
- **Take-away roti:** A\$1

enough A\$ cash with you to cover your trip. See the Quick Reference page for exchange rates.

The National Bank of Tuvalu on Funafuti is the country's only bank (see p739). Several major currencies, plus Fijian dollars, are accepted for exchange; the rate for cash is better than travellers cheques, but neither rate is great. There's a commission payable on travellers cheques.

Be warned: on our most recent visit there were no credit-card facilities available in Tuvalu and no ATMs. This may change with the possible (but as yet unconfirmed) introduction of ANZ banking services to the country (ring ☎ 20803 or email nbt@tuvalu.tv to check current information).

There is a **Western Union** (☎ 20622; www.westernunion.com) branch in Funafuti that accepts money transfers, but if the lines are down this may not happen as quickly as advertised.

A 10% government tax on accommodation is included in prices listed in this chapter. Tipping isn't expected.

TELEPHONE

Tuvalu's international telephone code is ☎ 688.

The anonymous sprawling yellow building near the airport is the Tuvalu Telecom building. You can make calls, buy phone-cards and get a local SIM card for your mobile phone here. The mobile phone system was introduced in 2005 and outgoing mobile phone calls are only slightly more expensive than landline.

A word of warning about the phone numbers in this book: on our most recent visit, local phone numbers were undergoing changes which were not complete and had yet to be reflected in any sort of printed directory; so expect some changes to the numbers listed here. If you're having no luck, try calling Tuvalu **directory enquiries** (☎ 20006) for an up-to-date listing.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Try the **government tourism officer** (☎ 20408; fax 20210; www.timelesstuvalu.com; Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning & Industries, top fl, Government Offices).

TIME

Tuvalu is 12 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). When it's noon in Tuvalu, it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am the same day in Sydney, Australia, and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

VISAS

Visitors do not require a visa and are granted a one-month entry permit on arrival. You need a valid passport and a return ticket – and a valid yellow-fever certificate if you have come from an infected area. Visa extensions, available at **immigration** (☎ 20815; Government Offices), are granted for a maximum of three months.

TRANSPORT IN TUVALU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Tuvalu's small international airport is on Funafuti.

Air Fiji (☎ 679-331 3666; www.airfiji.com.fj) flies from Suva to Funafuti (from F\$1300 return) on Monday, Thursday and Sunday in a 25-seater Brasilia aircraft. Make sure you reconfirm, as seats are in high demand.

Recently there was talk again about **Air Pacific** (www.airpacific.com) also starting to operate this route and extending the service north to Kiribati; check the website for up-to-date information. For more details about airlines see p841.

Sea

The MVs *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau*, both government-owned cargo/passenger ships, travel to Suva, Fiji, every three months or

DEPARTURE TAX

An international departure tax of A\$20 applies to all visitors over 12 years old.

so (the trip takes about four days). One-way fares are A\$73/316 for deck/double cabin, with meals. **Pacific Agencies** (☎ 679-331 5444; info@pacship.com.fj) is the agent for the MV *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* in Suva. The **Marine Services Office** (☎ 20055; Government Offices) handles schedules and bookings in Funafuti.

The cargo boat *Nei Matagare* makes trips roughly once a month between Tuvalu and Fiji. **Williams & Goshings** (☎ 679-331 2633; www.wgfiji.com.fj) are its Suva agents.

GETTING AROUND

Air

There is no domestic airline in Tuvalu.

Boat

All inter-island transport is by boat. Only Funafuti and Nukufetau have reef passages large enough for ships to enter their lagoons and only Funafuti has a real dock. This means ships must load and unload into a small boat, which can be hazardous in rough seas – not for those who aren't confident swimmers.

The MVs *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* typically visit each of the outer islands once every three or four weeks. The southern trip takes three or four days, and the northern trip about a week. Don't expect too much comfort: it's usually crowded with chickens and pigs as well as people, while toilets overflow and passengers are often seasick. Take LOTS of drinking water with you, as well as your own food; shipboard meals tend to be corned beef and rice, or rice and corned beef. A return trip to the northern/southern islands costs A\$250/190 for 1st class without food, and A\$107/87 for deck class without food.

For bookings and schedule confirmation, contact the **Marine Services Office** (☎ 20055; Government Offices) in Funafuti. Schedules are unreliable as the boats may be off for maintenance, or detouring to pick up VIPs.

Visiting yachts have to check in at Funafuti for immigration and customs clearance on arrival, and before leaving Tuvalu.

There are no mooring fees and no other formalities, but you must moor outside the conservation area.

Car & Motorcycle

There is no organised car hire. Motorcycles and mopeds are the most popular means of land transport, and are available

for rent on Funafuti for a daily rate of A\$10; you may be asked to produce your home licence. Driving is on the left side of the road.

Local Transport

The capital, Fongafale, has a minibus and taxi service.