

# AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS

## TONGA COUNTRY BRIEF



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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Country Brief is to provide information to volunteers across all Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) programs that will assist in the safe and successful completion of volunteer assignments in Tonga. The Brief provides information on important contacts, country background and history, cultural considerations, security guidelines, health and medical issues, transport, and other information for daily living in Tonga.

## **Contacts**

### **Australian High Commission, Tonga**

Salote Road  
Nuku'Alofa, Tonga  
Telephone (676) 23 244  
Facsimile (676) 23 243  
Email: ahctonga@dfat.gov.au

## **Emergency Numbers**

Police 922

Ambulance/Hospital 933

Fire 999

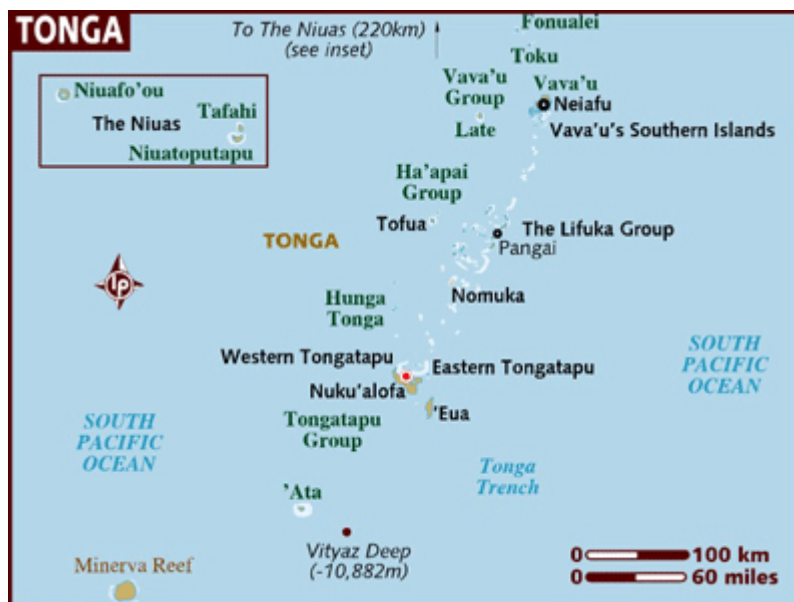
### **AHI Assist:**

24/7 Emergency Hotline: +61 2 9978 6666

Australian Business Volunteers, Policy No: 32089

For other contacts specific to your program please see supplement page at the end of this document.

## Country Profile



Land Area: 748 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 104 000 (2013)

People: 98% Tongan

Language: Tongan and English are the official languages. English is well known in major centres although may be less known in some rural areas.

Time: Papua New Guinea is 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Tonga does not observe daylight saving.

Climate: Tropical: wet season, including cyclone season (November - April), dry season monsoon (May - October); slight seasonal temperature variation.

Religion: 96% Christian, 3% Indigenous religions, and 1% Baha'i

Government: Tonga is a constitutional monarchy, making it unique in the Pacific. The governing structure comprises the Executive (Cabinet), Legislature and Judiciary, with the Cabinet answering to the Legislative Assembly. The King retains the right to veto legislation. The King appoints the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly.

The Prime Minister: Mr 'Akilisi Pohiva (2014)

Head of State: HM King Tupou VI (2012)

GDP: 503 million (2011 PPP\$)

GDP per capita: 4,856 (2011 PPP\$)

Currency: Papua New Guinea's unit of currency is the Pa'anga, which is divided into 100 seniti. Current exchange rates can be found at: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Economy: Agriculture is the leading productive sector, with a very small manufacturing sector. The tourism sector is modest but with potential for expansion. Tonga's main trading partners are New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, the United States and Japan. Most Tongan exports are agricultural produce while imports cover the full range of consumer and industrial goods. Tonga's economy is vulnerable to external shocks and is heavily reliant on remittances from Tongans working overseas, and foreign aid. The US is the main source of remittances, followed by New Zealand and Australia. Construction and infrastructure projects funded by donor grants and soft loans are sources of growth.

## History

Tonga was inhabited 3,000 years ago. The country is a very old Polynesian monarchy – its royal family goes back more than 1,000 years – with an old and well-developed social and political system. Occasional Europeans visited it from early in the 1600s: it was sighted by the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman in 1643 and later visited by the British explorer Captain James Cook. The first larger-scale arrival was in 1826, when Wesleyan missionaries landed and began a highly successful conversion campaign. Civil wars raged between Christian and non-Christian factions until Taufa'ahau Tupou, ruler of the island of Ha'apai and a Christian convert, gained control of and united the islands, becoming, in 1845, King George Tupou I (1845–93) and adopting the country's first constitution.

Tonga was never a British colony. In 1900, the King agreed a treaty of friendship with Britain, which gave Britain control of foreign affairs, and kept Tonga free from other predatory powers. The treaty was frequently revised until May 1970, when Tonga became fully independent.

From 1990 a pro-democracy movement gathered strength, challenging Tonga's political system which endeavoured to combine its 1,000 year-old feudal system with democracy. Elections did not result in any changes in the executive and only a small number of members of the Legislative Assembly were elected. The country did not, in consequence, have a developed party political system. Tonga's first-ever political party, the People's Party, was formed in 1994 out of the pro-democracy movement. In the 1996 elections four of the nine people's seats were won by pro-democracy candidates.



## Cultural Considerations

Contemporary Tongans often have strong ties to overseas lands. They may have been migrant workers in New Zealand, or have lived and travelled in New Zealand, Australia, or the United States. Many Tongans now live overseas, in a Tongan diaspora, and send home remittances to family members (often aged) who prefer to remain in Tonga. Tongans themselves often have to operate in two different contexts, which they often call *anga fakatonga*, the traditional Tongan way, and *anga fakapālangi*, the Western way. A culturally adept Tongan learns both sets of rules and when to switch between them.

Christianity is the main religion and Sunday is strictly observed as the Sabbath. Organised sporting functions and business transactions are not allowed. All shops and restaurants are closed, with the exception of hotel restaurants.

## Dress and Appearance

Tongans generally dress conservatively in keeping with the Christian traditions of the country. Men must wear a shirt at all times in public, with the exception of when they are at the beach, and should usually wear long pants. Women should cover their shoulders and chests completely and their legs at least to the knees – loose skirts or dresses with hemlines below the knee are most accepted. Western style swimwear is only worn at tourist resorts. Women can wear shorts and a t-shirt for swimming outside a resort.

The most important advice about clothing is to seek advice about what to wear in the tropics. Clothing that is moisture wicking, breathable and durable is recommended as the climate is hot in most places.

## Personal Behaviour

As a visitor to Tonga, ABV volunteers should be aware of and respect local culture and customs. Respect for those considered superior to oneself should always be shown. Do not refuse the offer of a gift or food.

Avoid holding a long conversation with someone of the opposite sex unless he/she is an ICM, supervisor, counterpart, fellow volunteer or a known friend. After hours, volunteers with supervisors or colleagues of the opposite sex should minimise long, frequent contact. If work trips are required, consider an additional travelling companion.

## Security Risks and Personal Safety

The DFAT Smart Traveller website has up-to-date information regarding travelling in Tonga and current risks to personal safety, and is available at:

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Tonga>

ABV volunteers should read this information prior to departure to Tonga and check it regularly while in country [subscription to email updates to this page is available on the above link]. Australian citizens should register with Smart Traveller prior to departure – link to do so is also available on this web page. ABV volunteers are also advised to monitor local media reports while in country to keep abreast of any potential security risks.

Please take note of the following advice for personal safety while in country:

- don't increase your vulnerability by excess alcohol drinking;

- as most crime is opportunistic, consider carrying fewer personal possessions in public, including cash and expensive jewellery/watches;
- women should avoid going out alone at night or alone to isolated locations, including beaches;
- if walking alone, let someone know your intended destination and estimated arrival time.

The Smart Traveller website link above also has further information which it is useful to become familiar with prior to travel – especially the ‘Safety and Security’, ‘Local Travel’, and ‘Laws’ tabs.

Tonga is prone to cyclones, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis.

## **Health and Medical**

Malaria, dengue fever and other mosquito-borne diseases are a risk throughout Tonga – on 2 February 2015 the Tongan Ministry for Health announced an outbreak of dengue fever in Tonga. Certification of vaccination against yellow fever or cholera is required for travellers over one year of age coming from or through infected areas. ABV volunteers are encouraged to take prophylaxis against malaria where necessary and take measures to avoid mosquito bites, including using insect repellent at all times.

All underground piped water supplies in the Nuku'alofa area are chlorinated and are deemed safe; but it is advisable to drink bottled water. Most homes have rainwater catchments for their own supply of drinking water. It is advisable to boil this water for drinking. Food-borne, water-borne and other infectious diseases (including tuberculosis, typhoid and filariasis) are common. You are advised to avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food. Illness caused by naturally occurring seafood toxins can also be a hazard. Seek medical advice and call your emergency assistance provider if you have a fever or are suffering from diarrhoea.

In an emergency situation, swift contact with your ICM is highly recommended, or for Emergency Medical Assistance contact your emergency assistance provider.

## **Transport and Accommodation**

All volunteers travelling to Tonga must have an appropriate passport, valid for at least 6 months from the date of departure. You do not need a visa if your stay in Tonga is less than 30 days. If your stay is extended to over 30 days, ABV will assist with provision of a visa with help of the ICM.

### **Flying and Airport Information**

Fua'amotu International Airport is Tonga's main airport and international gateway. The airport is 21km from the capital of Nuku'alofa. There are separate International and Domestic terminals - a shuttle bus service between the terminals is available for T\$5.

Taxis meet incoming international and domestic flights. An acceptable fare from the International Airport to downtown Nuku'alofa would be T\$30. Many hotels and guesthouses also offer airport transfers for guests. These need to be arranged prior to your arrival. Taxis, hotel mini-buses and the terminal transfer bus are found at the curbside directly outside both terminals

### **Taxis and Public Transport**

There are many taxis throughout Tonga with the majority based in Tongatapu. Taxis are often unmarked and are identified by the letter T at the beginning of the number plate. Taxis are not

metered and it is important to always agree on the fare before departure. Short trips around the capital should cost T\$5-6. Taxis can also be hired for a half or full day for sightseeing.

Most of the Island groups are serviced by inter island ferries, these are mainly used by the Tongan people as an affordable means of transport. These ferries also carry cargo and livestock etc and provide a vital link between the island groups. Visitors to Tonga can also travel on these ferries, most of which depart from Queen Salote Wharf in Nuku'alofa. Tickets are generally sold on board and also note there are no sailings on Sundays.

Once again like the ferries, the bus services are mainly used by locals, and run from between 8am and 5pm and can be waved down. Local knowledge about how to use the service is a real advantage and both locals and the drivers are only too happy to assist in this area.

## **Work Travel**

All volunteers must advise their Project Manager/ICM of any work/leisure travel in a timely manner, and ensure that any required travel forms are completed prior to the trip. Information required may include:

- date of travel;
- destination and route;
- details of any travel companions; and
- contact details whilst travelling (eg. travel accommodation telephone numbers and mobile telephone details).

## **Accommodation**

ABV volunteers may be accommodated in a hotel, a furnished apartment or a furnished house. All accommodation has been security reviewed against a standard set by ABV (DFAT?). In all cases accommodation will be secure, clean and waterproof with sound walls and floors. The following items are the standard volunteers can expect from their accommodation at their assignment location unless otherwise advised by the ICM or Project Manager:

- Beds with mattress, pillows, sheets and towels;
- Bathroom with running water in the shower or bath and a toilet;
- Air conditioning or ceiling fans;
- Lockable windows with insect screens and curtains;
- Some form of electricity;
- A small refrigerator;
- Table and chair;
- Cooking facilities where available;

Personal items such as international telephone calls, mini bar or room service are the responsibility of the volunteer.

You should be aware of the difference in living standards between a country like Australia and a developing country like Tonga. Through our ICM teams and host organisations, we ensure that accommodation provided is secure and clean, however many facilities taken for granted in Australia – air conditioning, hot water, television, western food - are not a given.



## Daily Life

The Westpac Bank of Tonga, the ANZ, and Malaysia Borneo-Finance (MBF) all have branches on Tongatapu. Westpac Bank of Tonga has branches on all of the main islands; and the MBF has a branch on Vava'u. Banks are present in the main centers as are ATM's accepting international debit/credit cards. Major credit cards are accepted at most major hotels and some restaurants and stores. Travellers' cheques are widely accepted at major banks and hotels. Tongan currency can be re-converted into Australian currency before departure from Tonga. There is a banking facility at the airport.

It is recommended that you inform your bank when you will be traveling overseas, and:

- activate internet banking to facilitate transfer of funds between savings and credit card accounts; and
- check on any extra charges associated with withdrawing funds from accounts whilst overseas.

There is a 15% consumption tax on all imports and domestic supplies of goods and services.

Tipping is not customary anywhere in Tonga although no offence will be caused if special service is rewarded in this way.

Business hours are:

- Banks hours: Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 4:00pm, Saturday 8.30 am – 11.30 am  
Commercial firms: Monday to Friday 8.00am – 4.30pm or 5.00pm Saturday 8.00am – 12.00noon
- Government hours: Monday to Friday 7.45am – 4.00pm

Main public holidays are celebrated as follows:

- 1st January – New Year's Day
- Good Friday/Easter Monday
- 25<sup>th</sup> April ANZAC Day
- 4<sup>th</sup> June – Emancipation Day (observed Monday 8 June in 2015)
- 17<sup>th</sup> September – Crown Prince's Birthday
- 4<sup>th</sup> November – Constitution Day (observed Monday 2 November in 2015)
- 4<sup>th</sup> December – Anniversary of King Tupou's 1's Coronation (observed Monday 7 December in 2015)
- 25<sup>th</sup> December – Christmas Day
- 26<sup>th</sup> December – Boxing Day

Electrical power is 240 volts using plugs common to Australia & New Zealand. Some form of surge protection is highly recommended for valuable electrical equipment and computers.

International roaming is available for those traveling with a mobile phone. Pre-paid SIM cards are available from the two mobile phone operators, TCC and Digicel. Public phones require a prepaid cards which are commonly available at retail outlets. Some public phones can be found that allow international credit card calling. Internet cafes can be found in all major centres.

The Post Office is located on Taufa'ahau Road in Nuku'alofa. Opening hours are Monday to Friday 8:30am – 4pm.

Food. The traditional diet of the Tongan people consisted mostly of taro, yams, bananas, coconuts and of course seafood - the staple of any island nation. Fale koloa (kiosks which open all hours and stock milk, bread and tinned products) and markets sell the best fresh produce. Private supermarkets and the Tonga Cooperative Federation (TCF) also exist in major towns.

Restaurants and resorts feature German, Italian, Japanese and Taiwanese cuisine as well as many traditional Tongan dishes and delicacies. Fresh seafood features on most restaurants as items like octopus, coral trout and lobsters are caught and sold daily.

What to bring. You should consider bringing enough supplies of toiletries and sunscreen for your entire stay as all brands may not be available in Tonga. Also consider bringing books, hobbies, music devices or laptop computer to dill in any spare time you have as you may not have access to what Australians consider usual forms of entertainment. It is also recommended that you bring a surge protection device for any electronic devices you bring.

## Further Information

The following websites may be useful sources of more information, including tourist information:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tonga/Pages/tonga.aspx>

<http://www.tonga.embassy.gov.au/nkfa/home.html>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tonga><http://www.tongaholiday.com/>