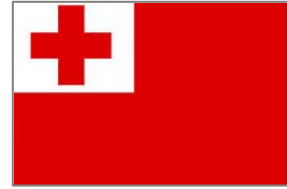


Tonga



Official name: Kingdom of Tonga

Capital: Nuku'alofa

Land: 747 sq. km

Population: 101,991 (2006)

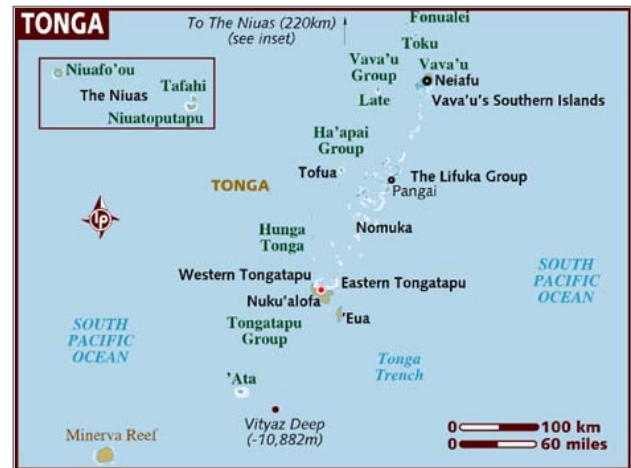
Currency: Pa'anga

EEZ: 700,000 sq. km

Language: English, Tongan

Economy: Agriculture

Religion: Christian denominations (Wesleyan, Mormon, Catholic)



(Source: www.lonelyplanet.com)

Brief history:

Tonga is an ancient Polynesian country of 170 islands with a history of human settlement extending back 3,000-3,500 years. Tonga's monarchical (Tu'i Tonga) tradition is over 1,000 years old; and at times has extended to include territory in parts of Fiji, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau. European contact with Tonga dates back to 1616 and early contacts included Abel Tasman and James Cook.

Tonga's contacts with the international community were extended through Wesleyan and Catholic missionaries who were active in Tonga from the 1790s. Taufa'ahau, the nephew of the ruler of Ha'apai, was baptized in 1831, taking the Christian name Siaosi (George) Tupou. Tupou became ruler of Ha'apai, Vava'u and Tongatapu following the deaths of his relevant relations. Tupou united Tonga under the name King George Tupou I; and established the current royal family line in Tonga. Tupou, with Wesleyan missionary Reverend Shirley Baker, drafted laws which prohibited serfdom and foreign ownership of land, and led to Tonga's Constitution of 1875. This constitution was remarkably advanced for its time, not only guaranteeing basic freedoms but also effectively ending a civil war. Tonga's constitution is now the second oldest formal written constitution in the world (after the US one).

The 1875 Constitution marked the formal establishment of Tonga as a nation state. Tonga was the only Pacific country never to be colonized. From 1900 to 1970 Tonga was, however, a signatory to Treaties of Friendship and Protection with Great Britain. In 1970 Tonga's protectorate status ended and it became a fully independent state within the Commonwealth.

The royal line has remained unbroken since 1845. King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV died in September 2006 after a reign of 40 years. His mother Queen Salote Tupou III ruled for 47 years, from 1918 until 1965. King George Tupou V was crowned in August 2008. He passed away on 18 March 2012 and has been succeeded by his youngest brother, King Tupou VI.

Political overview:

Tonga is a constitutional monarchy. The King commands considerable status but after 2010 constitutional reforms, his legal powers are much reduced. As Head of State, he retains oversight of lands and noble titles as well as foreign affairs, defence and the judiciary but all other matters are the responsibility of Parliament.

The Prime Minister is the Head of Government. He nominates the Cabinet, although both the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are formally appointed by the King. Cabinet holds executive authority. The legislature is a single-chamber assembly, comprising 17 People's representatives elected every four years by universal suffrage on a first-past-the-post system and 9 Nobles' representatives elected by the holders of 33 Noble titles of the Kingdom. The Speaker is selected from among the Nobles' representatives.

Tonga held its first elections under these reformed electoral and constitutional arrangements on 25 November 2010. The reforms followed an extensive and sometimes difficult democratization process which had in 2005 included a major public service strike and in 2006 riots which left much of downtown Nuku'alofa destroyed by fire.

The outcomes of the process, which included a Constitutional and Electoral Commission which consulted widely, were a widely accepted compromise. Tonga remains one of the rare examples in history where a reigning monarch has voluntarily surrendered power and a peaceful democratic transition taken place. The reforms are still bedding down, and work is continuing on other aspects of transparency and accountability such as a Freedom of Information Act and Anti-Corruption Commissioner.

Economic overview:

Tonga's economy is supported by a large flow of remittances from Tongans living abroad. Half the remittances come from the US and most of the rest from New Zealand and Australia where large numbers of Tongans live. After Tajikistan, Tonga relies more on remittances as a percentage of GDP than any other country in the world. A substantial drop in remittances due to the global economic downturn has had damaging effects on the Tongan economy and Government revenues. In recent years, donors have provided budget support.

Domestic economic activity is based on services, tourism and agriculture. Around 70 percent of the population derives at least part of their livelihood from farming, most of it for personal and domestic consumption. Exports include squash-pumpkin (to Japan and Korea), root crops and coconuts (to New Zealand) as well as kava and vanilla. Tourism is the largest source of foreign currency earnings after remittances but the sector remains comparatively undeveloped, with fewer than 30,000 tourist arrivals in 2011.

Education overview:

The education system in Tonga is organised around four basic levels. These are: non-compulsory early childhood education for children aged 3-5 years, primary education for ages 6-11 (classes 1-6), secondary education for ages 12-18 and post-secondary education (age 18 upwards). All children between the ages of 6 and 14 are legally required to attend school until at least six years of education have been completed. Primary education is free for government primary schools. Some private schools charge school fees.

Most higher education is pursued overseas but Tonga has some teacher training, nursing and medical training, a small private university, a women's business college, and a number of private agricultural schools.

Accrediting agency:

The Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board (TNQAB) ensure that Tonga's qualifications are valued as credible, both nationally and internationally.

TNQAB services the tertiary education sectors and is responsible for the quality assurance of non-university tertiary training providers. TNQAB's priority is to support its clients by providing effective and efficient services, within its statutory mandate.

Immigration:

All international air travellers require a valid passport. All non-Tongan passport holders must have a passport that is valid for at least 6 months prior to entry into Tonga.

Visas are required for all non-Tongan passport holders unless the citizen is a visitor to the Kingdom and holds a valid passport from one of the countries not requiring visas.

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