

Tuvalu

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This article is about the country. For other uses, see [Tuvalu \(disambiguation\)](#).

Tuvalu



[Flag](#) [Coat of arms](#)

Motto: *"Tuvalu mo te Atua"* [\(Tuvaluan\)](#)

"Tuvalu for the Almighty"

Anthem: *Tuvalu mo te Atua* [\(Tuvaluan\)](#)

Tuvalu for the Almighty

Royal anthem: *God Save the Queen*



Capital

[Funafuti](#)

[8°31′S 179°13′E](#)

Official language(s)

[Tuvaluan](#)

[English](#)

Demonym

[Tuvaluan](#)

Government

[Parliamentary democracy](#)
[\(Constitutional monarchy\)](#)

- [Monarch](#) [Elizabeth II](#)
- [Governor General](#) [Iakoba Italeli](#)
- [Prime Minister](#) [Willy Telavi](#)

Independence

- from the [United Kingdom](#) 1 October 1978

Area

- Total 26 km² ([226th](#))
10 sq mi
- Water (%) negligible

Population

- July 2011 estimate 10,544^[1] ([224th](#))

- Density	475.88/km ² (22nd) 1,142/sq mi
GDP (PPP)	2010 (est.) estimate
- Total	\$36 million (223rd)
- Per capita	\$3,400 (2010 est.) (164)
HDI (2003)	n/a (unranked) (n/a)
Currency	Tuvaluan dollar Australian dollar (AUD)
Time zone	(UTC+12)
Drives on the	left
ISO 3166 code	TV
Internet TLD	.tv
Calling code	688

Tuvalu (/tuːˈvɑːluː/ [ⓘ] listen *too-vah-loo* or /ˈtuːvəluː/ *too-və-loo*), formerly known as the **Ellice Islands**,^[2] is a [Polynesian island nation](#) located in the [Pacific Ocean](#), midway between [Hawaii](#) and [Australia](#).^[3] Its nearest neighbours are [Kiribati](#), [Nauru](#), [Samoa](#) and [Fiji](#). It comprises four [reef](#) islands and five true [atolls](#). Its population of 10,472 makes it the third-least populous [sovereign state](#) in the world, with only [Vatican City](#) and [Nauru](#) having fewer inhabitants. In terms of physical land size, at just 26 square kilometres (10 sq mi) Tuvalu is the fourth smallest country in the world, larger only than the [Vatican City](#) at 0.44 km² (0.17 sq mi), [Monaco](#) at 1.95 km² (0.75 sq mi) and [Nauru](#) at 21 km² (8.1 sq mi).

The first inhabitants of Tuvalu were [Polynesian people](#). In 1568 [Spanish](#) navigator [Álvaro de Mendaña](#) sailed through the islands and is understood to have sighted [Nui](#) during his expion in search of [Terra Australis](#). In 1819 the island of [Funafuti](#), was named Ellice's Island; the name Ellice was applied to all nine islands after the work of English hydrographer Alexander George Findlay (1812–1876).^[4] The islands came under [Britain's](#) sphere of influence in the late 19th century, when the Ellice Islands were declared a British [protectorate](#) by Captain Gibson, R. N. of [HMS *Curaçao*](#) between 9th and 16 October 1892. The Ellice Islands were administered as British protectorate by a [Resident Commissioner](#) from 1892 to 1916 as part of the [British Western Pacific Territories](#) (BWPT), and later as part of the [Gilbert and Ellice Islands](#) colony from 1916 to 1974.

In 1974, the Ellice Islanders voted for separate British dependency status. As a consequence Tuvalu separated from the Gilbert Islands which became [Kiribati](#). Tuvalu became fully independent within the [Commonwealth](#) on October 1, 1978. On September 5, 2000, Tuvalu became the 189th member of the [United Nations](#).

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History

Main article: [History of Tuvalu](#)



Tuvaluan man in traditional costume drawn by [Alfred Agate](#) in 1841 during the [United States Exploring Expedition](#).

Tuvaluans are a Polynesian people who settled the islands around 3000 years ago coming from Tonga and Samoa.^[5] During pre-European-contact times there was frequent canoe voyaging between the nearer islands. Eight of the nine islands of Tuvalu were inhabited; thus the name, Tuvalu, means "eight standing together" in [Tuvaluan](#). Possible evidence of fire in the [Caves of Nanumanga](#) may indicate human occupation thousands of years before that.

Tuvalu was first sighted by [Europeans](#) in 1568 with the voyage of [Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira](#) from [Spain](#) who is understood to have sighted the island of [Nui](#), which he named *Isla de Jesus* (Island of Jesus) but was unable to land. Keith S. Chambers and Doug Munro (1980) identify [Niutao](#) as the island that [Francisco Antonio Mourelle](#) named on May 5, 1781 thus solving what Europeans had called *The Mystery of Gran Cocal*.^{[6][7]} Mourelle's map and journal named the island *El Gran Cocal* ('The Great Coconut Plantation'), however the latitude and longitude was uncertain.^[7]

The next European to visit was Arent Schuyler de Peyster, of York, captain of the armed [brigantine](#) or [privateer](#) *Rebecca*, sailing under British colours,^[8] which passed through the southern Tuvalu waters in May 1819; de Peyster sighted [Nukufetau](#) and [Funafuti](#), which he named Ellice's Island after an English Politician, [Edward Ellice](#), the Member of Parliament for Coventry and the owner of the *Rebecca's* cargo.^[7] In 1820 the Russian explorer [Mikhail Lazarev](#) visited [Nukufetau](#) as commander of the *Mirny*.^[7] Following 1819 whalers were roving the Pacific though visiting Tuvalu only infrequently because of the difficulties of landing ships on the atolls. No settlements were established by the whalers.^[7]

Peruvian slave raiders ("[blackbirders](#)") seeking workers to mine the [guano](#) deposits on the [Chincha Islands](#) in Peru, combed the Pacific between 1862 and 1865, including the southern islands of Tuvalu.^[9] The Rev. A. W. Murray,^[10] the earliest European missionary in Tuvalu, reported that in

1863 about 180 people^[11] were taken from [Funafuti](#) and about 200 were taken from [Nukulaelae](#)^[12] as there were fewer than 100 of the 300 recorded in 1861 as living on [Nukulaelae](#).^{[13][14]}

Christianity first came to Tuvalu in 1861 when Elekana, a deacon of a Congregational church in [Manihiki, Cook Islands](#) became caught in a storm and drifted for 8 weeks before landing at [Nukulaelae](#).^[7] Elekana began [proselytizing](#) Christianity. He was trained in a [London Missionary Society](#) school in Samoa before beginning his work in establishing the Church of Tuvalu.^[7] In 1865 the Rev. A. W. Murray of the [London Missionary Society](#) - a [Protestant congregationalist](#) missionary society - arrived as the first European missionary where he too [proselytized](#) among the inhabitants of Tuvalu. By 1878 the [Church of Tuvalu](#) was well established with preachers on each island.^[7]



A man from the [Nukufetau](#) atoll, drawn by [Alfred Agate](#) 1841.

Trading firms & traders

Trading companies became active in Tuvalu in the mid-nineteenth century; the trading companies engaged [palagi](#) traders who lived on the islands, some islands would have competing traders with dryer islands only have a single trader.^[15] In 1892, Captain Davis of the [HMS Royalist](#), reported on trading activities and traders on each of the islands visited.^[16] Captain Davis identified the following traders in the Ellice Group: Edmund Duffy ([Nanumea](#)); [Jack Buckland](#) ([Niutao](#)); Harry Nitz ([Vaitupu](#)); John (also known as Jack) O'Brien ([Funafuti](#)); Alfred Restieaux and Fenisot ([Nukufetau](#)); and Martin Kleis ([Nui](#)).^[17] This was the time at which the greatest number of [palagi](#) traders lived on the atolls, acting as the agent for the trading companies.^[15]

In the later 1890s and into first decade of the 20th century, structural changes occurred in the operation of the Pacific trading companies, with the trading companies moving from a practice of having traders resident on each island to trade with the islanders to a business operation where the [supercargo](#) (the cargo manager of a trading ship) would deal directly with the islanders when a ship would visit an island. From 1900, the numbers of [palagi](#) traders in Tuvalu declined, with the last of the [palagi](#) traders being [Fred Whibley](#) on [Niutao](#) and Alfred Restieaux on [Nukufetau](#). However, by 1909 there were no resident [palagi](#) traders representing the trading companies,^[18] although both [Fred Whibley](#) and Alfred Restieaux^[19] remained in the islands until their deaths.

Scientific expions & travellers



Woman on [Funafuti](#), [Harry Clifford Fassett](#) (1900)

The [United States Exploring Expion](#) under [Charles Wilkes](#) visited [Funafuti](#), [Nukufetau](#) and [Vaitupu](#) in 1841.^[20] During the visit of the expion to Tuvalu [Alfred Thomas Agate](#), engraver and illustrator, recorded the dress and tattoo patterns of men of [Nukufetau](#).^[21]

In 1890, [Robert Louis Stevenson](#), his wife [Fanny Vandegrift Stevenson](#), and her son [Lloyd Osbourne](#) sailed on the *Janet Nicoll* a trading steamer owned by Henderson and Macfarlane of Auckland, New Zealand, which operated between Sydney, Auckland and into the central Pacific.^[22] The *Janet Nicoll* visited Tuvalu;^[23] while Fanny records that they made landfall at [Funafuti](#) and [Niutao](#), however Jane Resture suggests that it was more likely that they visited [Nukufetau](#) rather than [Funafuti](#).^[24] An account of the voyage was written by [Fanny Vandegrift Stevenson](#) and published under the title *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol*,^[25] together with photographs taken by [Robert Louis Stevenson](#) and [Lloyd Osbourne](#).

In 1894, Count Rudolph Festetics de Tolna, his wife Eila (née Haggin)^[26] and her daughter Blanche Haggin visited [Funafuti](#) aboard the yacht *Le Tolna*.^[27] *Le Tolna* spent several days at [Funafuti](#) with the Count photographing men and woman on [Funafuti](#).^[28]

The boreholes on [Funafuti](#) at the site now called *David's Drill* are the result of drilling conducted by the [Royal Society of London](#) for the purpose of investigating the [formation of coral reefs](#) to determine whether traces of shallow water organisms could be found at depth in the [coral](#) of Pacific [atolls](#). This investigation followed the work on [the structure and distribution of coral reefs](#) conducted by [Charles Darwin](#) in the Pacific. Drilling occurred in 1896, 1897 and 1911. Professor [Edgeworth David](#) of the [University of Sydney](#) lead the expions in 1896 & 1897.^[29] Photographers on the expions recorded people, communities and scenes at Funafuti.^[30]

[Harry Clifford Fassett](#), captain's clerk and photographer, recorded people, communities and scenes at [Funafuti](#) during a visit of *USFC Albatross* when the U.S. Fish Commission were investigating the [formation of coral reefs](#) on Pacific [atolls](#) in 1900.^[31]

Politics

Main article: [Politics of Tuvalu](#)

Tuvalu is a [Parliamentary Democracy](#) and [Commonwealth realm](#), with [Queen Elizabeth II](#) serving as the country's [head of state](#), bearing the title [Queen of Tuvalu](#). The Queen does not reside in the islands and is represented in Tuvalu by a [Governor General](#), who is appointed by the Queen upon the advice of the country's elected Prime Minister. The local [unicameral](#) parliament, or *Fale I Fono*, has 15 members and is elected every four years. Its members select a Prime Minister who is the [head of government](#). The Cabinet is appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Each island also has its own high-chief or ulu-aliki, and several sub-chiefs ([alikus](#)) and elders. The elders form together an island council of elders or te sina o fenua (literally: "grey-hairs of the land"). In the past, another caste, namely the one of the priests (tofuga) was also amongst the decision-makers. The sina o fenua, aliki and ulu-aliki exercise informal authority on a local level. Ulu-aliki are always chosen based on ancestry, and their powers are now shared with the pule o kaupule (elected village presidents; one on each atoll).^[32] There are no formal political parties and election campaigns are largely on the basis of personal/family ties and reputation.

The highest court in Tuvalu is the High Court; there are eight Island Courts with limited jurisdiction. Rulings from the High Court can be appealed to the Court of Appeal of Tuvalu.^[33] From the Court of Appeal there is a right of appeal to Her Majesty in Council, i.e., the [Privy Council](#) in London.

Defence and law enforcement

Tuvalu has no regular military forces, and spends no money on the military. Its police force includes a Maritime Surveillance Unit for search and rescue missions and surveillance operations. The police have a [Pacific-class patrol boat](#) (HMTSS *Te Mataili*) provided by Australia under the Pacific Patrol Boat Program for use in maritime surveillance and [fishery](#) patrol.^[34] HMTSS stands for *His/Her Majesty's Tuvaluan State Ship* or *His/Her Majesty's Tuvalu Surveillance Ship*.

See also: [Law enforcement in Tuvalu](#)



It has been suggested that [Law enforcement in Tuvalu](#) be [merged](#) into this article or section. ([Discuss](#)) *Proposed since November 2011.*

Districts



Map of Tuvalu.

Main article: [Islands of Tuvalu](#)

Tuvalu's small population is distributed across nine islands, five of which are [atolls](#). The smallest island, Niulakita, was uninhabited until it was settled by people from Niutao in 1949.

Local government districts consisting of more than one islet:

- [Funafuti](#)
- [Nanumea](#)
- [Nui](#)
- [Nukufetau](#)
- [Nukulaelae](#)
- [Vaitupu](#)

Local government districts consisting of only one island:

- [Nanumanga](#)
- [Niulakita](#)
- [Niutao](#)

Foreign relations

Main article: [Foreign relations of Tuvalu](#)

Tuvalu participates in the work of [Secretariat of the Pacific Community](#), or SPC (sometimes Pacific Community) and is a member of the [Pacific Islands Forum](#), the [Commonwealth of Nations](#) and the [United Nations](#). Tuvalu has maintained a mission at the [United Nations](#) in [New York City](#) since 2000. Tuvalu is a member of the [World Bank](#) and the [Asian Development Bank](#).

Tuvalu maintains close relations with [Fiji](#), [New Zealand](#), [Australia](#), [Japan](#), [South Korea](#), the [United Kingdom](#) and the [European Union](#). It has diplomatic relations with the [Republic of China \(Taiwan\)](#); the ROC maintains the only resident embassy in Tuvalu and has a large assistance program in the islands.

A major international priority for Tuvalu in the UN, at the 2002 [Earth Summit](#) in [Johannesburg](#), [South Africa](#) and in other international fora is promoting concern about global warming and possible sea level rise. Tuvalu advocates ratification and implementation of the [Kyoto Protocol](#). In December 2009 the islands stalled talks on climate change at the [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) in [Copenhagen](#), fearing some other developing countries were not committing fully to binding deals on a reduction in carbon emission, their chief negotiator stated "Tuvalu is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, and our future rests on the outcome of this meeting."^[35] Tuvalu participates in the operations of the [Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission](#) (SOPAC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREC).^[36]

Tuvalu is a party to a treaty of friendship with the United States, signed soon after independence and ratified by the [U.S. Senate](#) in 1983, under which the United States renounced prior territorial claims to four Tuvaluan islands ([Funafuti](#), [Nukefetau](#), [Nukulaelae](#) and [Niulakita](#)) under the [Guano Islands Act](#) of 1856.^[37]

Tuvalu participates in the operations of the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency.^[38] The Tuvaluan government, the [US government](#), and the governments of other Pacific islands, are parties to South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT). That agreement entered into force in 1988 with the current SPTT agreement expiring on June 14, 2013.^[39] Tuvalu is also a member of the [Parties to the Nauru Agreement](#) which addresses management of tuna purse-seine fishing in the tropical western Pacific.^[40]

Geography and environment



A beach at [Funafuti](#) atoll.

Main article: [Geography of Tuvalu](#)

Tuvalu consists of three [reef](#) islands and six true [atolls](#). Its small, scattered group of [atolls](#) have poor soil and a total land area of only about 26 square kilometres (less than 10 sq. mi.) making it the fourth smallest country in the world. The islets that form the [atolls](#) are very low lying. [Nanumaga](#), [Niutao](#), [Niulakita](#) are [reef](#) islands and the six true [atolls](#) are [Funafuti](#), [Nanumea](#), [Nui](#), [Nukufetau](#), [Nukulaelae](#) and [Vaitupu](#). [Funafuti](#) is the largest [atoll](#) of the nine low [reef](#) islands and [atolls](#) that form the Tuvalu volcanic island chain. It comprises numerous islets around a central lagoon that is approximately 25.1 kilometres (15.6 miles) (N–S) by 18.4 kilometres (11.4 miles) (W–E), centred on 179°7′E and 8°30′S. On the [atolls](#) an annular reef rim surrounds the lagoon, with several natural reef channels.^[41]

The eastern shoreline of Funafuti Lagoon was modified during WW-II when the airfield (what is now [Funafuti International Airport](#)) was constructed. As well several piers were constructed, beach areas filled, and deep water access channels were excavated. These alternations to the reef and shoreline have resulted in changes to wave patterns with less sand accumulating to form the beaches as compared to former times; and the shoreline is now exposed to wave action. Several attempts to stabilize the shoreline have not achieved the desired effect.^[42] The reefs at Funafuti have suffered damage, with 80 per cent of the coral having been bleached as a consequence of the increase of the ocean temperatures and acidification from increased levels of carbon dioxide.^[43] A reef restoration project has investigated reef restoration techniques;^[44] and researchers from Japan have investigated rebuilding the [coral reefs](#) through introduction of [foraminifer](#).^[45]

The highest elevation is 4.6 metres (15 ft) above sea level on [Niulakita](#),^[46] which gives Tuvalu the second-lowest maximum elevation of any country (after the [Maldives](#)). However, the highest

elevations are typically in narrow storm dunes on the ocean side of the islands which are prone to over topping in tropical cyclones, such as occurred with Tropical Cyclone Bebe.^{[47][48]}

Because of the low elevation, the islands that make up this nation are threatened by current and future [sea level rise](#).^[49] Additionally, Tuvalu is annually affected by [king tide](#) events which peak towards the end of the austral summer, and raise the sea level higher than a normal [high tide](#).^[50] As a result of historical sea level rise, the [king tide](#) events lead to flooding of low lying areas, which is compounded when sea levels are further raised by [La Niña](#) effects or local storms and waves. In the future, sea level rise may threaten to submerge the nation entirely as it is estimated that a sea level rise of 20–40 centimetres (8–16 inches) in the next 100 years could make Tuvalu uninhabitable.^[51]
^[52]



A wharf and beach at [Funafuti](#) atoll

Tuvalu experiences westerly gales and heavy rain from October to March - the period that is known as *Tau-o-lalo*; with tropical temperatures moderated by easterly winds from April to November. [Drinking water](#) is mostly obtained from rainwater collected on roofs and stored in tanks; these systems are often poorly maintained, resulting in lack of water.^[53] Aid programs of Australia and the European Union have been directed to improving the storage capacity on Funafuti and in the outer islands.^[54]

The rising population results in increased demand on fish stocks, which are under stress;^[43] although the creation of the [Funafuti Conservation Area](#) has provided a fishing exclusion area that helps sustain fish populations across the Funafuti lagoon. Population pressure on the resources of Funafuti and in-adequation sanitation systems have resulted in pollution.^{[49][55]} The Waste Operations and Services Act 2009 provides the legal framework for the waste management and pollution control projects funded by the European Union that are directed to organic waste composting in eco-sanitation systems.^[56] Plastic waste is also a problem as much imported food and other commodities is supplied in plastic containers or packaging.

When the airfield at Funafuti was constructed during WW-II the coral base of the atoll was used as fill to create the runway; the resulting [borrow pits](#) impacted on the water aquifer; at these pits the sea water can be seen bubbling up through the porous coral rock to form pools on each high tide.^{[57][58]}
^[59]

Tourism

See also: [Funafuti Conservation Area](#) and [Public holidays in Tuvalu](#)

The main island of [Funafuti](#) is the focus of travelers, as the only airport in Tuvalu is the [Funafuti International Airport](#), with the island having hotel accommodation.^[60] [Ecotourism](#) is a motivation of travelers to Tuvalu. The [Funafuti Conservation Area](#) consists of 33 square kilometers of ocean, reef, lagoon, channel and six uninhabited islets.^[61]

The outer atolls can be visited on the two passenger/cargo ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau*, which provide a round trip visiting the outer islands every three or four weeks.^[62] There is no tourist accommodation on the outer atolls.

Economy

Main article: [Economy of Tuvalu](#)

From 1996 to 2002, Tuvalu was one of the best performing Pacific Island economies and achieved an average real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 5.6 per cent per annum. Since 2002 economic growth has slowed with GDP of 1.5% in 2008. Tuvalu was exposed to rapid rises in world prices fuel and food in 2008, with the level of inflation peaking at 13.4%.^[63] The International Monetary Fund 2010 Report on Tuvalu estimates that Tuvalu experienced zero growth in GDP in 2010, after the economy contracted by about 2 percent in 2009.^[64]

Public sector workers make up about two thirds of those in formal employment. About 15% of adult males work as seamen on foreign flagged merchant ships. Tuvaluans are otherwise involved in traditional subsistence agriculture and fishing.^[1]

Tuvalu generates income from the [Tuvalu Trust Fund](#), the commercialisation of the '.tv' web address, fishing licences, sale of stamps and coins; remittances from Tuvaluans living in Australia and New Zealand; and remittances from Tuvaluan sailors employed on overseas ships.^{[65][66]}

In 1998, Tuvalu began deriving revenue from use of its area code for "[900](#)" lines and from the sale of its ".tv" Internet domain name.^[67]

The [Tuvalu Trust Fund](#) was established in 1987 by the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#) and [New Zealand](#).^[65] The value of the [Tuvalu Trust Fund](#) is approximately \$100 million.^{[63][64][68]}

Australia and New Zealand continue to contribute capital to the [Tuvalu Trust Fund](#) and provide other forms of development assistance.^{[65][66]} The [US government](#) is also a major revenue source for Tuvalu, with 1999 payments from the South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT) at about \$9 million, a total which is expected to rise annually. The SPTT entered into force in 1988 with the current SPTT agreement expiring on June 14, 2013.^[39] Financial support to Tuvalu is also provided by [Japan](#), [South Korea](#) and the [European Union](#).^[69]

The United Nations designates Tuvalu as a 'Least Developed Country', because of its limited potential for economic development, absence of exploitable resources, small size and vulnerability to external economic and environmental shocks.^[70]

Because of the country's remoteness, tourism does not provide much income; a thousand tourists are estimated to visit Tuvalu annually.^[71]

Demographics

Main article: [Demographics of Tuvalu](#)

The country's population has more than doubled since 1980, and with a growth rate of 0.702%, the population at the 2002 census was 9,561,^[72] and is estimated to reach 10,544 in July 2010.^[1] The population of Tuvalu is primarily of [Polynesian](#) ethnicity; about 4% of the population is [Micronesian](#).^[1] The net migration rate is estimated at -7.02 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2011 est.)^[1]

The primary destinations for migration are New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand provides for annual quota of 75 Tuvaluans granted work permits under the *Pacific Access Category*, which was announced in 2001.^[73] The applicants register for the Pacific Access Category (PAC) ballots; the primary criteria for applicants is that the principal applicant must have a job offer from a New Zealand employer.^[74] Tuvaluans can also gain access to seasonal employment in the horticulture and viticulture industries in New Zealand under the *Recognised Seasonal Employer* (RSE) Work Policy, which was introduced in 2007 for the employment of up to 5,000 workers from Tuvalu and other Pacific islands.^[75] Australia and Tuvalu are discussing extending access to the *Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme* to Tuvaluans.^[76]

Life expectancy at birth is 62.7 years for males and 66.9 years for females (2011 est.)^[1]

The [Tuvaluan language](#) is spoken by virtually everyone, while a language very similar to [Gilbertese](#) is spoken on [Nui](#). English is also an official language, but is not spoken in daily use. Parliament and official functions are conducted in [Tuvaluan](#).



A Tuvaluan dancer at Auckland's [Pasifika Festival](#)

The introduction of Christianity ended the worship of the spirits of ancestors and other deities, along with the power of the *vaka-atua* (the priests of the old religions). Laumua Kofe describes the objects

of worship as varying from island to island, although ancestor worship is described by Rev. D.J. Whitmee in 1870 as being common practice.^[77] About 97% of the Tuvaluans are members of the [Church of Tuvalu](#), a [Protestant](#) Christian church. Tuvaluans continue to have respect for their ancestors within the context of a strong Christian faith.

Other religions practised on the island include [Seventh-day Adventist](#) (1.4%), [Bahá'í](#) (1%).^[1] and the [Ahmadiyya Muslim Community](#) (400 members, 0.4%).^[78]

Culture

Dance and Music

See also: [Music of Tuvalu](#)

The contemporary style of Tuvaluan music consists of a number of dances, most popularly including *fatele*. The traditional styles of [fakanau](#) and [fakaseasea](#),^[79] were used to celebrate leaders and other prominent individuals. The Tuvaluan style can be described "as a musical microcosm of Polynesia, where contemporary and older styles co-exist".^[79]

Heritage

The traditional community system still survives to a large extent on Tuvalu. Each family has its own task, or *salanga*, to perform for the community, such as fishing, house building or defence. The skills of a family are passed on from parents to children.

Most islands have their own *fusi*, or community owned shops that are similar to a convenience store, you can buy canned foods and bags of rice, but goods are cheaper and *fusi* give better prices for their own produce.^[32]

Another important building is the *falekaupule* or traditional island meeting hall,^[80] where important matters are discussed and which is also used for wedding celebrations and community activities such as a *fatele* involving music, singing and dancing.^[32] *Falekaupule* is also used as the name of the council of elders - the traditional decision making body on each island. Under the *Falekaupule* Act, *Falekaupule* means "traditional assembly in each island...composed in accordance with the *Aganu* of each island". *Aganu* means traditional custom and culture.^[80]



Canoe carving on [Nanumea](#)

Cuisine

The traditional foods eaten in Tuvalu are [pulaka](#), [bananas](#), [breadfruit](#), [coconut](#), seafood ([coconut crab](#), [turtle](#) and fish), seabirds (*taketake* or [Black Noddy](#) and *akiaki* or [White Tern](#)) and [pork](#).^[32]

[Pulaka](#) is the main source for [carbohydrates](#). It is grown in large pits below the water table in composted soil. Seafood is the main source of [protein](#). Bananas and breadfruit are supplemental crops. Finally, coconut is used for its juice, making beverages, and to improve the taste of other dishes. Pork is eaten mostly at *fateles* (or parties with dancing to celebrate certain events).^[32]

Catching flying fish by using a boat, a butterfly net, and a spotlight to attract the flying fish, is both a source of food and an exciting activity.^[32]

See also: [Aquaculture in Tuvalu](#)

Language

Main article: [Tuvaluan language](#)

The [Tuvaluan language](#) of the [Ellicean group](#) spoken in Tuvalu. It is more or less distantly related to all other Polynesian languages, such as [Hawaiian](#), [Māori](#), [Tahitian](#), [Samoan](#), and [Tongan](#), and most closely related to the languages spoken on the [Polynesian outliers](#) in [Micronesia](#) and Northern and Central [Melanesia](#). Tuvaluan has borrowed considerably from Samoan, the language of Christian missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There are about 13,000 Tuvaluan speakers worldwide.^{[81][82]} Tuvaluan radio services are operated by the [Tuvalu Media Corporation](#).

Sport and leisure

A traditional sport played in Tuvalu is *kilikiti*, which is similar to [cricket](#).^[83] Another sport popular and specific to Tuvalu is [ano](#), which is played with 2 round balls of 12 cm diameter.^[32]

More common sports such as [football](#), [volleyball](#) and [rugby union](#) are also played in the country as recreational activities. Tuvalu has sports organisations for badminton, basketball, tennis, table tennis, volleyball and weightlifting. A major sporting event is the "Independence Day Sports" festival held annually on 1 October during the Tuvaluan Independence Day celebrations.

Tuvalu has a [national football team](#), which trains at the [Vaiaku Stadium](#) in [Funafuti](#). The [Tuvalu national football team](#) competes in the Pacific Games and South Pacific Games. The Tuvalu Football Association is an associate member of the [Oceania Football Confederation](#) (OFC) and is seeking membership of [FIFA](#).^[84]

Tuvalu first participated in the South Pacific Games in 1978. Tuvalu first [participated in the Commonwealth Games](#) in 1998, when a weightlifter attended the games held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.^[85] Two table tennis players attended the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England;^[85] Tuvalu entered competitors in shooting, table tennis and weightlifting at the [2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne](#), Australia; and three athletes attended the [2006 Commonwealth Games in Delhi](#), India, participating in the discus, shot put and weightlifting events.^[85]

The Tuvalu Amateur Sport Association was recognised as the Tuvalu National Olympic Committee in July 2007. Tuvalu entered the Olympic Games for the first time at the [2008 Summer Games](#) in Beijing, China, with a weightlifter and two athletes participating in the men's and women's 100 metre sprint.

At the 2011 Pacific Games held in New Caledonia, Tuvaluan weightlifters won 2 silver medals and one bronze medal.^[86]

See also: [Tuvalu national football team](#), [Rugby union in Tuvalu](#), [Tuvalu at the Commonwealth Games](#), and [Tuvalu at the 2008 Summer Olympics](#)

Transport



Manu Folau off [Vaitupu](#) Harbour

Transport services in Tuvalu are limited. There are about eight kilometres of roads.^[1] The streets of Funafuti were paved and lit in mid-2002, and other roads are unpaved. Tuvalu is among [a few countries that do not have railroads](#).

[Funafuti](#) is the only port, and there is also a deep-water berth in the harbour at [Nukufetau](#). The [merchant marine](#) fleet consists of two passenger/cargo ships *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau*. These ships carry cargo and passengers between the main atolls and also travel between [Suva](#), [Fiji](#)^[87] and [Funafuti](#)^[62] 3-4 times a year. The *Nivaga II* and *Manu Folau* provide a round trip visiting the outer islands every three or four weeks. The *Manu Folau* is a 50-meter vessel that was a gift from [Japan](#) to the people of Tuvalu.

The only airport is [Funafuti International Airport](#); it is a tarred strip. [Air Pacific](#), which owns Fiji Airlines, trading as [Pacific Sun](#) operates services between [Suva](#) (originating from [Nadi](#)) and [Funafuti](#); with a 40-seat plane twice a week.

Education

Education in Tuvalu is free of charge and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15 years. Each island has a primary school. The secondary school is on [Vaitupu](#). Students board at the school during the school term, returning to their home islands each school vacation.

School attendance at school is 10 years for males and 11 years for females (2001).^[1] Adult literacy rate is 99.0% (2002).^[64]

The Tuvaluan Employment Ordinance (1966) sets the minimum age for paid employment at 14, and prohibits children below age 15 from performing hazardous work.^[88]

El Niño & La Niña effects and the effects of climate change

Main article: [Climate change in Tuvalu](#)



[Funafuti](#)

At its highest, Tuvalu is only 4.6 metres (15 ft) above sea level, and officials have been concerned about the effects of rising sea levels for some years.^[89] Whether there are measurable changes in the sea level relative to the islands of Tuvalu is a contentious issue.^[90] There are problems associated with the pre-1993 sea level records from Funafuti so that a data over a longer period needs to be collected in order to have more reliable data.^[91] The degree of uncertainty as to estimates of sea level change relative to the islands of Tuvalu is reflected in the conclusions made from the available data.^[91] The 2011 report of the *Pacific Climate Change Science Program* published by the Australian Government,^[92] concludes that "[t]he sea-level rise near Tuvalu measured by satellite altimeters since 1993 is about 5 mm per year."^[93]

Observable changes that have occurred over the last ten to fifteen years show Tuvaluans that there have been changes to sea levels. These observable changes include sea water bubbling up through

the porous coral rock to form pools on each high tide and flooding of low-lying areas, including the airport, during [spring tides](#) and [king tides](#).^{[58][59][94]}

As low-lying islands, lacking a surrounding shallow shelf, the island communities of Tuvalu are especially susceptible to changes in sea level and undissipated storms that hit the island.^[95] It is estimated that a sea level rise of 20–40 centimetres (8–16 inches) in the next 100 years could make Tuvalu uninhabitable.^{[51][52]}

The 2011 report of *Pacific Climate Change Science Program* of Australia concludes in relation to Tuvalu that over the course of the 21st century:

- Surface air temperature and seasurface temperature are projected to continue to increase (very high confidence).^[93]
- Annual and seasonal mean rainfall is projected to increase (high confidence).^[93]
- The intensity and frequency of days of extreme heat are projected to increase (very high confidence).^[93]
- The intensity and frequency of days of extreme rainfall are projected to increase (high confidence).^[93]
- The incidence of drought is projected to decrease (moderate confidence).^[93]
- Tropical cyclone numbers are projected to decline in the south-east Pacific Ocean basin (0–40°S, 170°E–130°W) (moderate confidence).^[93]
- Ocean acidification is projected to continue (very high confidence).^[93]
- Mean sea-level rise is projected to continue (very high confidence).^[93]



Ocean side of [Funafuti](#) atoll showing the storm dunes, the highest point on the atoll.

The [South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission](#) (SOPAC) suggests that, while Tuvalu is vulnerable to climate change, environmental problems such as population growth and poor coastal management also affect sustainable development on the island. SOPAC ranks the country as extremely vulnerable using the [Environmental Vulnerability Index](#).^[96]

While some commentators have called for the relocation of the population of Tuvalu to [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), or [Kioa](#) in [Fiji](#), the former Prime Minister [Maatia Toafa](#) said his government did not regard rising sea levels as such a threat that the entire population would need to be evacuated.^{[97][98]}

In spite of persistent Internet rumours that New Zealand has agreed to accept an annual quota of 75 evacuees, the annual quota of 75 Tuvaluans granted work permits under the Pacific Access Category (that was announced in 2001) is not related to environmental concerns.^[73]

Tuvalu experiences the effects of [El Niño](#) and [La Niña](#), caused by changes in ocean temperatures in the equatorial and central Pacific. [El Niño](#) effects increase the chances of tropical storms and [cyclones](#), while those of [La Niña](#) increase the chances of droughts in Tuvalu.^[99] Typically the islands of Tuvalu receive between 200mm to 400mm of rainfall per month, however in 2011 a weak [La Niña](#) effect caused a drought by cooling the surface of the sea around Tuvalu. A [state of emergency](#) was declared on September 28, 2011;^[100] with rationing of available fresh-water on the islands of [Funafuti](#) and [Nukulaelae](#).^{[101][102][103]}

Households on [Funafuti](#) and [Nukulaelae](#) are rationed to two buckets of fresh water a day (40 litres).^{[104][105]} The governments of [Australia](#) and [New Zealand](#) have responded to the fresh-water crisis by supplying temporary desalination plants,^{[106][107][108]} and assisting in the repair of the existing desalination unit that was donated by Japan in 2006.^[109] In response to the 2011 drought, Japan has funded the purchase of a 100 m³/d desalination plant and two portable 10 m³/d plants as part of its Pacific Environment Community (PEC) program.^{[110][111]} Aid programs from the European Union,^[54] ^[56] and Australia also provide water tanks as part of the longer term solution for the storage of available fresh water.^[112]

See also: [2011 Tuvalu drought](#) and [Renewable energy in Tuvalu](#)

See also



[***Geography portal***](#)



[***Oceania portal***](#)



[***Commonwealth realms portal***](#)



[Book: Tuvalu](#)

[Wikipedia books](#) are collections of articles that can be downloaded or ordered in print.

- [Outline of Tuvalu](#)
- [Tuvalu National Library and Archives](#)
- [Talofa! Tuvalu Met Service](#)
- [South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project \(SPSLCMP\)](#)
- [Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission - PacificWater SOPAC \(water, sanitation and hygiene\)](#)
- [Communications in Tuvalu](#)
- [ISO 3166-2:TV](#)
- [LGBT rights in Tuvalu](#)
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- [Tuvalu Overview \(japanese / english\)](#)
- [Alofa Tuvalu \(français / english\)](#)
- [Klima Tuvalu \(français / english / norsk\)](#)
- [van de voetbalbond van Tuvalu \(nederlands\)](#)
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General information

- [Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program](#)
- [Tuvalu](#) entry at *The World Factbook*
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