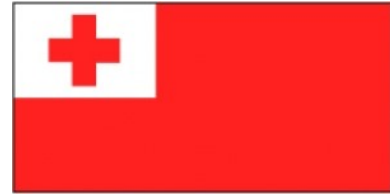




Tonga

Joined the Commonwealth 1970 - visited by the Queen in 1977



Tonga is a small Polynesian island nation in the central south-west Pacific

Pop: (2013) 105,000 Capital: Nuku'alofa Area: 748 sq km

Tonga is made up of 172 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. The western islands are volcanic whilst those further east are coral. Tonga straggles the International Date Line, the only country so to do. They are known as the 'Friendly Islands' because of the welcome they gave to Captain Cook in 1773. Many Tongans live overseas and contribute to the economy through regular remittances. Tongatapu is the largest island.

The climate is hot and humid all year though it is cooler between April to December. The economy is dominated by subsistence agriculture with small plantations on Tongatapu but cash crops, such as squash, are exported. Other islands, such as the Vava'u group are densely wooded.

Tonga has a conservation programme with a series of marine and forest reserves. There is not a huge variety of wildlife but at Kolovai on Tongatapu there is a large colony of flying foxes (fruit bats) with their metre wing spans. Cruise ships often call in at Vava'u where whale watching, game fishing and surfing are popular activities.



The newest part of the Commonwealth? An eruption of an undersea volcano in December 2014 off the island of Hunga has now formed an island 500m across and 250m high

