

TUVALU

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Photo courtesy of ['Mr J'](#)

**Greetings in:
Tuvaluan (Tuvalu)**

Talofa

Tuvaluan People



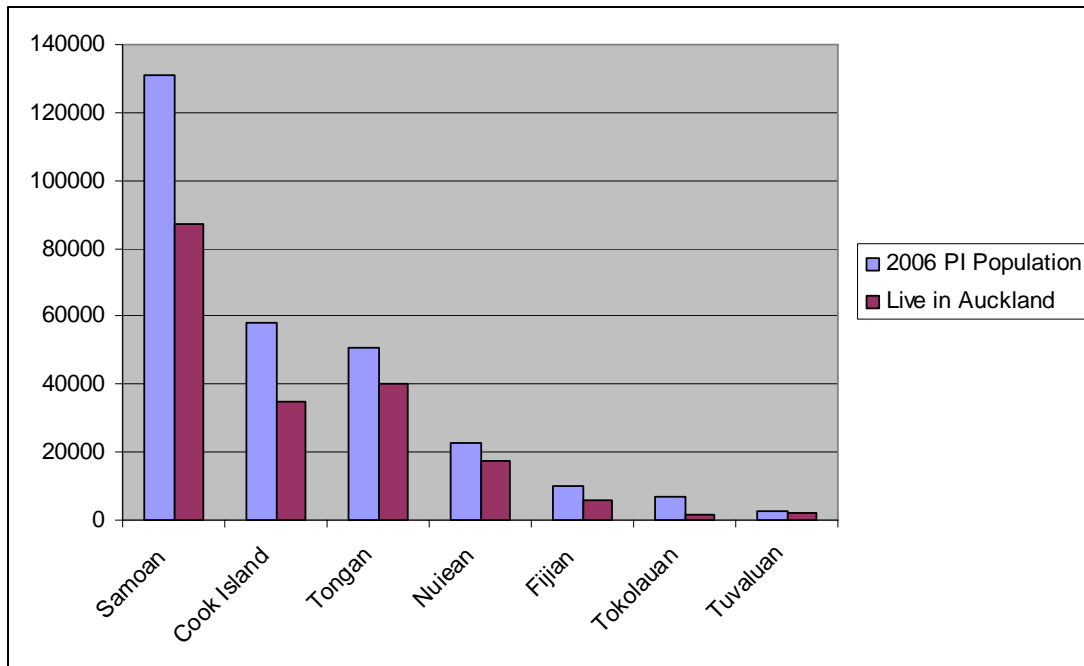
- In 2006, Tuvaluans were the *seventh* largest Pacific ethnic group in New Zealand, making up 2,625 or 1 percent of New Zealand's Pacific population (265,974).
- The Tuvaluan population increased by 34 percent (660) between 2001 and 2006.
- The median age of the Tuvaluan population (half are younger and half are older than this age) was 20 years. By comparison, the median ages for the Pacific and total New Zealand populations were 21 years and 36 years, respectively.
- Tuvaluans *born in New Zealand account for 37 percent* (954) of the total Tuvaluan population.
- 71 percent (1,635) of Tuvaluans are able to hold an everyday conversation in Tuvaluan. *This figure has remained steady since 2001.*
- 96 percent (2,316) of Tuvaluans affiliated with a religion. Of those Tuvaluans who affiliated with a religion, *97 percent (2,244) affiliated with a Christian religion.*
- 59 percent (732) of Tuvaluan adults have a formal educational qualification (secondary school or post-school qualification). The comparable figures for the total Pacific and New Zealand populations were 65 percent and 75 percent, respectively.
- 80 percent (2,109) of the Tuvaluan population *live in the Auckland region*, which is a 3 percentage point decrease since 2001.

...Dr Manjula Luthria, a senior economist with the World Bank, writes: "All the money we will ever give to poor, small, remote Pacific Islands will never equal what the islanders themselves will contribute from hard, honest work. At the moment, remittances comprise 39 per cent of GDP for Tonga, 36 per cent for Tuvalu and 14 per cent for Samoa." (my italics)

from:

[Pacific worker scheme a no-brainer](#), by Tapu Misa

Tuvaluan workers are amongst the 5000 Pacific Island workers who have come to New Zealand for the seasonal worker scheme.



Graph above: The number of Pacific Island people who live in Auckland compared to the total PI populations - note that far fewer Tokelauans live in Auckland than in Wellington

The following material is an abridged and edited version of the Tuvalu entry on Microsoft Encarta.

Tuvalu

I. Introduction

Tuvalu, small island country located in the western Pacific Ocean. Tuvalu's nearest neighbours are the Fiji Islands, about 1,050 km to the south, and Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), about the same distance to the southeast. Formerly known as the Ellice Islands, Tuvalu was part of the British Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC) until it separated from the Gilberts (now Kiribati) in 1975 and achieved independence in 1978. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, an association of nations that includes the United Kingdom and a number of its former dependencies. The atoll of Funafuti is the capital of Tuvalu. [Photo Funafuti Beach]



II. Land and Resources

Tuvalu is a chain of nine low-lying coral islands, extending from northwest to southeast for about 600 km (about 400 mi). None of the islands has an elevation of more than 5 m (16 ft). Five of the islands—Funafuti, Nanumea, Nui, Nukufetau, and Nukulaelae—are atolls. The remaining islands—Nanumaga, Niutao, Vaitupu, and

Niulakita—are single islands with smaller lagoons. Tuvalu has a total land area of 26 sq km (10 sq mi).

Tuvalu has thin, sandy soil. Coconut trees thrive almost everywhere, but other vegetation is limited. Land animals are likewise limited. The surrounding waters contain a wide variety of fish, octopus, and crab. Because of Tuvalu's porous soil, the only source of fresh water is rain collected in catchment systems.

The tropical climate of Tuvalu is warm and humid throughout the year, with an average annual temperature of about 30° C.

Like other low-lying Pacific countries, Tuvalu has expressed concern that sea levels could rise as a result of global warming. The United Nations listed Tuvalu as among the nations most at risk of complete submersion due to global warming. However, research has been *inconclusive* as to the likelihood and extent of an impending catastrophe.

III. The People of Tuvalu

The population of Tuvalu was estimated at 12,181 in 2008, yielding an overall population density of 469 persons per sq km (1,213 per sq mi). About one-third of the people live on Funafuti in and around the capital; people continue to move there from the other islands in search of employment, thereby increasing governmental concerns about overcrowding there. About 1,000 Tuvaluans live and work overseas, particularly in the phosphate mining industry on Nauru.

Tuvaluans are almost all ethnic Polynesians. English and Tuvaluan are the nation's official languages. Most people are bilingual, and literacy rates are high.

Most of the population belongs to the Congregationalist Church of Tuvalu, a Protestant church. Other Christian denominations are also represented. Social life centres around the church and family gatherings. Tuvaluans value harmonious social relations and modesty.

IV. Economy

Tuvalu is listed by the United Nations as one of the world's least developed countries. The economy is mainly a subsistence one, and Tuvalu depends heavily on economic assistance for government and other major expenditures. Income from a trust fund established by Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom in 1987 provides about half of the government's recurring budget requirements. Other important sources of revenue include the sale of postage stamps designed for collectors, the sale of licenses to foreign fleets fishing within Tuvalu's exclusive economic zone, and remittances from Tuvaluans working in the phosphate mining operation on Nauru and on ships around the world. In 1994 the gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at \$8 million, or about \$800 per person.

Subsistence activities, particularly fishing and the cultivation of food crops such as coconuts, taro, pandanus, bananas, and payaya, dominate the domestic economy. *Only*

about one-quarter of the total labour force engages in paid employment; about half of the wage earners work in the government service sector.

V. Government

Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. As a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, Tuvalu recognizes the British monarch as its own sovereign and, as such, its head of state. The monarch is represented in Tuvalu by a governor-general, who is appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister.

Tuvalu is active in regional affairs. It is a member of the South Pacific Commission, an advisory body of Western and Pacific nations promoting social stability in the South Pacific, and the South Pacific Forum, a regional organization that addresses the foreign affairs and international trade of its member countries. Tuvalu became a member of the United Nations in 2000.

VI. History

Little is known about its early history. However, the Tuvaluan language is related to Samoan, and Samoa is believed to be the first settlers' place of origin.

In 1819 British captain Arent De Peyster sighted Nukufetau and Funafuti, which he named Ellice Island after the owner of his ship, British politician Edward Ellice. All of the islands of present-day Tuvalu were sighted by 1826, and soon the entire island group became known as the Ellice Islands.

In 1856 the United States claimed the four southern islands of the group to mine guano deposits in the region. In the 1860s labour recruiters known as blackbirders abducted about 400 native islanders to work in the mines of Peru. This, combined with the spread of European diseases, significantly reduced the native population on the islands.

In 1865 British missionary A. W. Murray of the London Missionary Society placed on the islands Samoans who had recently adopted Christianity and charged them with spreading the religion. Almost the entire population quickly adopted Christianity. They abandoned traditional customs that conflicted with the new faith, effecting a major transformation of the society on the islands.

Under a 1979 treaty of friendship with Tuvalu, the United States gave up its claims to the four southern islands. In 1992 a member of parliament proposed a motion that would make Tuvalu a republic independent of British association, but only one out of the eight governmental districts supported the proposal.

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Customs of Tuvalu

Marriage and Family

Mothers are very protective of daughters because virginity is highly prized in a bride. Some weddings are quietly arranged several years in advance by the families involved; otherwise, couples make their own choice.

The traditional competitiveness between the bride's and groom's families to provide the best and most food at a wedding feast is discouraged on some islands, either by prior agreement between the families about their respective responsibilities, or by a pastor sponsoring a group wedding of several couples and a combined feast afterwards. Celebrations can last for days. The newlyweds spend their first night at the groom's family home and their second at the bride's family home.

Most Tuvaluans are in some way related to each other. Each person knows everyone's general kinship ties. Since one shares character and reputation with one's relatives, one is also bound to share material goods. To be *kaiu* (stingy) is to be despised, and one can ask for goods from relatives without shame.

Households are shared by the extended family. The elderly are cared for by their children and often help raise their grandchildren. Grandparents are considered the most qualified to raise children and teach them how to behave in culturally required ways. All family decisions must be approved by the elders. Older men become more involved in community discussions, and elderly men make *kolokolo* (coconut fibre string) for use around the home.

Mothers are mainly responsible for disciplining their children, although fathers take action in cases of serious misbehaviour. Women cook, feed the livestock, make household items such as mats and thatched roof panels, see to the needs of the family, and work in the *pulaka* (swamp taro) pits. Men fish, help in the *pulaka* pits, and are responsible for agriculture.

The typical *fale* (house) is a rectangular structure made of timber posts from matured coconut stumps, which support a pandanus thatch roof that covers a loose coral floor (concrete in some homes). The floor is elevated above a coral foundation and is made comfortable by rough coconut-frond mats under fine pandanus mats. The home is fitted with woven coconut-frond shutters that are lowered when it rains.

Eating

The Tuvaluan diet is comprised of *pulaka*, *fuaga mei* (breadfruit), *futi* (plantains or cooking bananas), cooked or raw fish, crayfish, pork, chicken, and such local vegetables as *laulu* (spinach). Many dishes are prepared in *lolo* (coconut cream). Tropical fruits like *oolesi* (papaya) and bananas are eaten. Foods are normally steamed, boiled, or roasted in a ground oven. Tuvaluans quench their thirst by drinking *pi* (coconut milk). Imported items such as flour, sugar, rice, salt beef, corned

beef, and tea have also made their way into the diet and are popular among those who can afford them.



Tuvaluans eat three meals a day. Breakfast (*kaiga i taeao, inuti*) often includes a cup of warm, fresh toddy made from coconut sap called *ssali kaleve*. Toddy is collected twice daily by older boys and young men who are responsible for a few coconut trees each. Toddy is a primary source of vitamin C, especially when fresh. It can also be made into a syrup for cooking or fermented as an alcoholic beverage.

Meals are prepared in an *umu* (cooking house), a separate structure that contains an open fire. Meals may be eaten at home or sometimes away, such as when food is taken by women to a returning fishing party. All meals begin with a blessing. The midday meal (*kaiga i ttuutonu*) on Sunday is a major occasion with families eating together, sitting cross-legged on the mat-covered floor. Most food is eaten with the hands; a water bowl is passed around for washing before and after the meal. Neighbors share food, especially after a successful fishing trip or harvest.

Socializing

Welcoming people is an important ritual in Tuvalu. When people first meet or when they arrive from another island or abroad, they shake hands and say, or are welcomed with, *Taalofa!* (“Greetings”). Relatives use a *sogi* (sniffing) gesture, in which they press their face to the other’s cheek and sniff deeply. They may do this on occasions when someone is leaving or arriving on the island, or as an affectionate way to greet children. If meeting after a long absence, old friends may slap one another on the back as they exchange phrases that show how close they are and how pleased they are to see each other.

Since most Tuvaluans see the same people often in the same day, they do not greet each other with “Taalofa!” but instead say *E fano koe ki fea?* (“Where are you going?”) or *E aa koe na?* (“What are you doing” or “How are you?”). Greetings may continue with inquiries about a person’s family and friends.

Titles and last names are not often used when addressing others. First names are known and used by almost all Tuvaluans. When speaking English, Tuvaluans adopt the English custom of using titles when appropriate.

Unannounced visits are usual in Tuvalu, and guests are always welcome. Sunday is a popular day for visiting, but any day is acceptable (especially if it is raining hard and no one is working). One would not normally visit early in the morning or around the time when people usually work or prepare meals. Friends sometimes drop in on one another, but it is mostly relatives who visit one another; daughters frequently visit their mothers.

Because the traditional timber-framed house has no permanent walls, only shutters that are lowered, visitors rarely need to knock to announce their presence. It is

customary to first remove any footwear, and then to enter and sit down on the *papa* (pandanus mat). If a mat is not laid down, the visitor waits for one to be spread out. If it is necessary to walk past someone who is sitting or lying down, one says *Tulou* (“Excuse me”) to apologize for being above the level of the person’s head. One also says “Tulou” when reaching for something above another person’s head.

One sits cross-legged on the mat, although a woman may extend one leg to her side and tuck the other under it. Except during formal speeches in the *maneapa* (community hall; *ahiga* on northern islands), one might also stretch his or her legs out straight. Hosts normally offer guests fresh toddy, or share green drinking coconuts or tea. If it happens to be mealtime, guests are invited to eat. If a friend or relative passes by the house during mealtime, someone in the house might call out *Vau o kai!* (“Stop and eat with us”). The passerby will stop and chat briefly but does not normally stay to eat.

Very special occasions call for a *fakaala* (feast) in the *maneapa*, with food served on a tray woven from coconut fronds. The meal ends when the main chief is finished. It is followed by formal speeches, dances, and more speeches as hosts and recipients thank each other.

Recreation

Popular sports in Tuvalu include soccer, basketball, cricket, and volleyball. Young people also play a traditional sort of volleyball called *te ano*. Movies are shown in those *maneapa* equipped with generators or electricity.

Tuvaluans enjoy dancing. Special occasions almost always include the traditional *faatele* or the more modern *siva* dance. Young people enjoy the more casual *tuisi* (“twist”) dances, which are popular fund-raising events. The *faatele* is a line dance performed by men or women (most commonly young women) wearing pandanus leaf skirts, greenery, and flower garlands. Dancers tell stories with their body movements and are accompanied by onlookers singing, clapping, and beating wooden drums made from boxes or biscuit tins covered with mats. The *siva* is performed by young women who dance and sing as young men play the guitar and sing.

Holidays and Celebrations

New Year’s Day in Tuvalu is rung in on 1 January. Easter is celebrated in the spring. On Funafuti Atoll, Bomb Day (23 April) commemorates the day during World War II when a Japanese bomb fell through a church roof and destroyed the interior; a U.S. corporal had directed 680 villagers out of the building just moments before. Queen Elizabeth II’s Birthday is celebrated in June, although her actual birth date is in April; the reason for the switch is said to be England’s notoriously unpleasant April weather. National Children’s Day in August features children’s sports and crafts. Tuvalu Day—two days, really, 1 October and 2 October—celebrates the anniversary of the country’s independence with dancing and a parade on the Funafuti Atoll airstrip. Hurricane Day on 21 October remembers the 1972 Hurricane Bebe.

The birthday of Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, is a holiday on 14 November, and Christmas is celebrated on 25 December.