



Tuvalu

KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1978

Population: 10,000 (2013)

GDP p.c. growth: 1.7% p.a. 1990–2013

Official languages: Tuvaluan, English

Time: GMT plus 12 hrs

Currency: Australian dollar (A\$); Tuvaluan dollar

Geography

Area: 26 sq km

Coastline: 24 km

Capital: Funafuti

Tuvalu, formerly the Ellice Islands, is a group of atolls lying south of the equator in the western Pacific Ocean, south of Kiribati and north of Fiji. Funafuti, the main island and capital, lies 1,046 km north of Suva, Fiji. The other islands are Nanumanga, Nanumea, Niulakita, Niutao, Nui, Nukufetau, Nukulaelae and Vaitupu.

Area: 26 sq km, although the atolls extend in a chain 595 km long.

Topography: The islands seldom rise higher than 4.5 metres above sea level. Five islands have large lagoons that are enclosed within the coral reef. The remaining four islands are pinnacles of land rising up solid from the seabed. Most people live on the island of Funafuti, on Funafuti Atoll.

Climate: The mean annual temperature is 30°C, with little seasonal variation, though March–October tends to be cooler. Humidity is high. Trade winds blow from the east for much of the year. Although the islands are north of the recognised hurricane belt, severe cyclones struck in 1894, 1972 and 1990. Rainfall is high, averaging 3,535 mm p.a. The wettest season is November–February.

Environment: There are no streams or rivers in the country and ground water is not safe to drink; water needs are met by catchment of rainwater and, increasingly, by desalination. The Japanese government has built one desalination plant and plans to build another. Some 40 per cent of the island of Funafuti was severely damaged during World War II and is virtually uninhabitable. Other significant environmental issues are: beachhead erosion because of the removal of sand for building materials; excessive

clearance of forest undergrowth for use as fuel; damage to coral reefs from the spread of the Crown of Thorns starfish; and rising sea level threatening the underground water table.

Vegetation: The heavy rainfall provides more luxuriant vegetation than that on neighbouring Kiribati. Coconut palms cover most of the land. Forest covers 33 per cent of the land area and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2012.

Wildlife: Lizards, turtles and several resident species of birds are the most notable forms of indigenous animal life. Birds include reef herons, white-tailed tropic-birds, terns and noddies.

Main towns: Vaiaku (on Funafuti, 5,100 in 2010), Asau (on Vaitupu, 650), Lolua (on Nanumea, 570), Savave (on Nukufetau, 520) and Kua (on Niutao, 480).

Transport: Tuvalu has only a few roads (total extent 8 km) and, before 2002 when tarring was completed, these were made from impacted coral and supplemented by dirt tracks.

There is a deep-water lagoon at Funafuti, which ships are able to enter at Nukufetau. The islands are served by a passenger and cargo vessel, based at Funafuti, which occasionally calls at Suva, Fiji. Ships from Fiji, Australia and New Zealand call at Funafuti.

The only airfield is on Funafuti, at the eastern tip of the island. In 1992 a new runway was completed with Commonwealth technical assistance and international funding, replacing the old grass airstrip. There are scheduled flights from Majuro in the Marshall Islands, Tarawa in Kiribati, and Nadi and Suva in Fiji.

Society

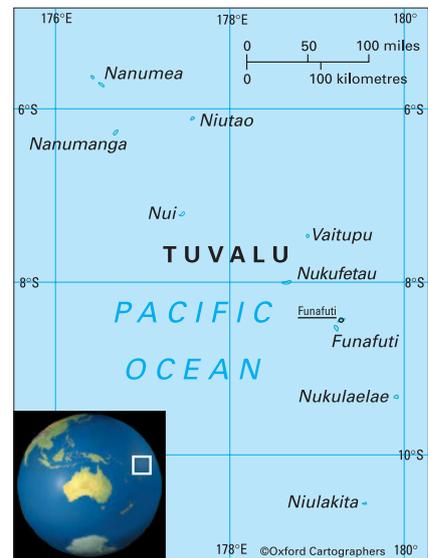
KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 385

Life expectancy: 65 years (est.)

Population: 10,000 (2013); population density on inhabited islands very high, especially on Funafuti; 58 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 24 per 1,000 people (est.); life expectancy 65 years (est.)

In February 2000, a request was made to New Zealand for resettlement of about one-



third of Tuvalu's population who were threatened by rising sea level.

The Tuvaluans are a Polynesian people.

Language: Tuvaluan and English are official languages. The people of Nui Island speak the language of Kiribati, I-Kiribati.

Religion: Mainly Christians, mostly of the Church of Tuvalu (Ekalesia Tuvalu), autonomous since 1968 and derived from the Congregationalist foundation of the London Missionary Society. There are small Roman Catholic communities on Nanumea and Nui, and some Seventh Day Adventists and Baha'is.

Health: Public spending on health was 15 per cent of GDP in 2012. There is a hospital on Funafuti and dispensaries on all the permanently inhabited islands. Health is generally good; there are occasional outbreaks of mosquito-borne dengue fever but no malaria. Some 98 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 83 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 24 per 1,000 live births in 2013.

Education: There are seven years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary six, with cycles of four and two years. There are ten state primary schools, two on the island of Vaitupu and one on each of the other eight inhabited islands. There is one state secondary boarding school

on Vaitupu, with about 600 students, and one private secondary school run by the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu. The school year starts in February.

The Maritime Training Institute on Funafuti (founded in 1979) provides vocational and technical training for those seeking employment on ships and fishing boats and in-service training for serving seamen. The Technical Education Centre offers training in building trades. Tuvalu is a partner in the regional University of the South Pacific, which has its main campus in Suva, Fiji, and a campus on Funafuti.

Media: The government publishes *Tuvalu Echoes* fortnightly in Tuvaluan and English, and a news sheet, *Sikuleo o Tuvalu*, in Tuvaluan.

Tuvalu Media Corporation provides Radio Tuvalu, a public radio service to all the islands. There is access to foreign TV broadcasts via satellite.

There are 86 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

Communications: Country code 688; internet domain '.tv'. There is internet access and a post office in Funafuti.

For every 1,000 people there are 147 landlines, 344 mobile phone subscriptions and 370 internet users (2013).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Commonwealth Day (second Monday in March), Bomb Day (23 April), Gospel Day (second Monday in May), Queen's Official Birthday (second Saturday in June), National Children's Day (early August), Independence Day (two days in early October), Heir to the Throne Day (second Monday in November), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Each island has its own exclusive holiday. Bomb Day commemorates the bombing of Funafuti by Japan during World War II.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday and Easter Monday.

Tuvalu on the international stage

With populations of about 10,000 each, Tuvalu and Nauru are the smallest Commonwealth member nations. They are also two of the world's smallest democracies.

Although Tuvalu had already fielded teams at the Commonwealth Games, the country only made its first appearance in an Olympic Games at Beijing in August 2008.

Tuvalu has been able to capitalise on its fortune in having rights to the highly marketable internet domain of '.tv'.

New Zealand, Australia and the European Union pitched in to help Tuvalu during a drought in 2011, caused by La Niña altering the surface of the sea. The donors provided temporary desalination plants and water tanks. Japan has also funded desalination equipment for the islands.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2013

GNI: US\$63m

GNI p.c.: US\$6,630

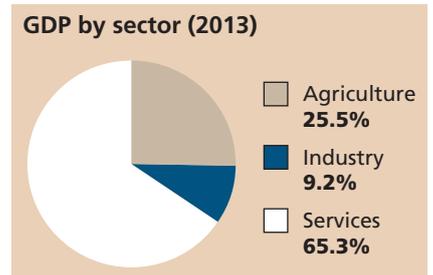
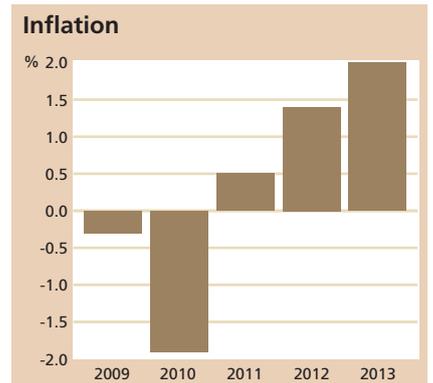
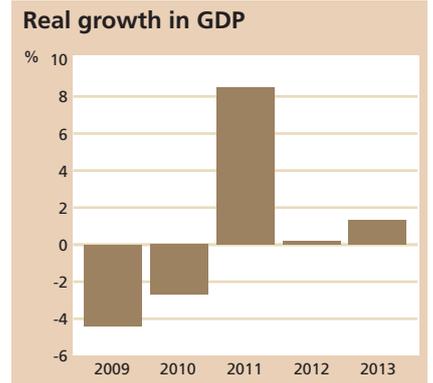
GDP growth: 0.5% p.a. 2009–13

Inflation: 0.3% p.a. 2009–13

In terms of population, Tuvalu is among the smallest countries in the world. It has very few resources and few sources of revenue – fishing licences, remittances from overseas workers (especially seamen and those living in New Zealand), small-scale copra exports, sale of postage stamps and coins, sale of passports and resale of rights to international telephone codes (initially to the sex industry and subsequently for gambling) – and balance-of-payments deficits have to be made up by income from the Tuvalu Trust Fund and bilateral aid, especially from Australia and New Zealand. During 1988–98 GDP growth averaged 5.2 per cent and was among the highest in Pacific Island economies.

In 1987, the governments of Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Japan and South Korea (and Tuvalu itself) acknowledged that the country would need financial support for the foreseeable future, and each government agreed to contribute money to set up a Tuvalu Trust Fund. The fund is invested by commercial fund managers and income is drawn by the government as required, so long as its current value is above its real value according to the Australian consumer price index. At its foundation, the fund totalled A\$27.1 million; subsequent contributions – mainly by Tuvalu itself – added a further A\$38.6 million; and the fund was valued in September 2012 at A\$127 million.

In August 1998 a North American company agreed to lease Tuvalu's internet domain '.tv'. In December 2001 another company took over the lease agreeing to pay the Tuvalu government US\$2.2 million a year plus five per cent of revenue exceeding US\$20 million



per year for the right to market '.tv' until December 2016.

People on Funafuti have a higher income than those living mainly at subsistence level on the outer islands. The country looks to regional co-operation, through the Pacific Community and in smaller groupings on matters of common interest such as fisheries, the marketing of copra and the expansion of regional air services.

After 1998 growth slowed, in the face of the international downturn. It then raced ahead in 2000–01, moderating but generally good in 2002–07. Then, in response to the world economic downturn of 2008–09, the economy contracted – by 4.4 per cent in 2009 and 2.7 per cent in 2010 – before it recovered in 2011–15.

History

The population of Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice or Lagoon Islands, is thought to have dropped from 20,000 in 1850 to 3,000 in 1875, thanks to slave-traders and imported

European diseases. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorate was established by Britain in 1892 (the Gilbert Islands are now called Kiribati) and the protectorate became a colony in 1916.

A referendum held in 1974 established that most Ellice islanders wanted separate status from the Gilbert Islands. The country was renamed Tuvalu, an old name meaning 'eight standing together' (Tuvalu has nine islands or island groups, but one has very little land above sea level). The Ellice Islands became a separate British dependency in October 1975, and gained independence as Tuvalu on 1 October 1978.

Toaripi Lauti, Chief Minister of the Tuvalu House of Assembly from October 1975, was independent Tuvalu's first Prime Minister (1978–81). He was succeeded by Dr Tomasi Puapua from 1981. Puapua was defeated in the September 1989 elections by Bikenibeu Paeniu.

In February 2000, the UN accepted Tuvalu as the organisation's 189th member and in September 2000 it became a full member of the Commonwealth, having been a special member since it joined in 1978.

The September 1993 elections resulted in a deadlock, Puapua and Paeniu both receiving equal support in the new Parliament. Puapua withdrew from the December 1993 elections and Paeniu was defeated by Kamuta Latasi, who became Prime Minister. In December 1996, the government was removed from power after an unexpected vote of no confidence gained the support of seven of the 12 members of Parliament. In a subsequent secret parliamentary ballot, Paeniu was elected Prime Minister in preference to Latasi. In the general election of March 1998, seven assembly members were re-elected, the Prime Minister among them. Former Prime Minister Latasi was defeated in his Funafuti constituency. When Parliament reconvened in April 1998 the members re-elected Paeniu as Prime Minister by ten votes to two.

In April 1999 Paeniu lost a no-confidence vote, and Education and Health Minister Ionatana Ionatana was elected by Parliament to succeed him. Ionatana died suddenly in December 2000 and Deputy Prime Minister Lagitupu Tuilimu acted as Prime Minister until Parliament elected Faimalaga Luka to the post in February 2001. Koloa Talake was chosen to succeed Luka as Prime Minister when, in December 2001, four MPs changed their allegiance.

In 2001 New Zealand agreed to accept an annual quota of Tuvaluans wishing to emigrate as the sea level rises, starting from 2002 and continuing for at least 30 years. In

2003 discussions were under way about emigration of Tuvaluans to Niue, where the population had declined due to emigration to New Zealand.

Constitution

Status: Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II

Legislature: Parliament of Tuvalu

Independence: 1 October 1978

Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. The British sovereign is head of state and is represented by a Governor-General, who must be a citizen of Tuvalu and is appointed by the head of state on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is elected by Parliament and is head of government. The cabinet consists of the Prime Minister, plus up to four other ministers, appointed by the Governor-General from among the members of Parliament, on the advice of the Prime Minister. The cabinet advises the Governor-General who must accept its advice.

Parliament is composed of 15 members: two elected every four years by universal adult suffrage from seven electoral districts and one from the remainder. The Speaker, elected by the members, presides over Parliament.

The constitution provides for the operation of a judiciary and for an independent public service. It guarantees protection of all fundamental rights and freedoms, and provides for the determination of citizenship.

Politics

Last elections: 31 March 2015

Next elections: 2019

Head of state: Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General, Sir Iakoba Italeli (2010–)

Head of government: Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga

Ruling party: No party system

Women MPs: 7%

There are no political parties in Tuvalu. Following the July 2002 general election, when Prime Minister Koloa Talake lost his

seat, Saufatu Sopoanga was elected by Parliament to be Prime Minister. However, after the by-elections in May 2003, he no longer commanded the support of the majority of MPs, but refused to recall Parliament until after October 2003 when one opposition member was appointed to cabinet and, following another by-election, one more member joined the government benches. However, in August 2004 Sopoanga was unable to win a vote of confidence and in October 2004 Maatia Toafa was elected Prime Minister.

Eight new members were elected in the August 2006 general election, Prime Minister Toafa being the only member of his cabinet to retain their seat. Parliament subsequently elected Apisai Ielemia Prime Minister.

In the September 2010 general election, ten of the 15 members from the previous Parliament were re-elected. Parliament then elected Maatia Toafa Prime Minister; he defeated Kausea Natano by eight votes to seven. On 21 December 2010, however, the new head of government was defeated in a no-confidence vote and on 24 December Willy Telavi was chosen by Parliament to succeed him, defeating Enele Sopoaga by eight votes to seven.

On 2 August 2013 Prime Minister Willy Telavi lost a vote of no confidence (eight to four) and on 4 August Sopoaga was elected Prime Minister (eight to five).

Twelve of the 15 members of the previous Parliament were returned in the general election on 31 March 2015. Parliament assembled on 10 April to choose a Prime Minister and Enele Sopoaga was re-elected uncontested.

International relations

Tuvalu is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum and United Nations.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Plant and animal

Further information

Tuvalu Islands Home Page:	www.tuvaluislands.com
Central Statistics Division:	www.spc.int/prism/country/tv/stats
Timeless Tuvalu:	www.timelesstuvalu.com
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Tuvalu

Media

Islands Business:	www.islandsbusiness.com
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material must be declared and might be quarantined.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Many Tuvaluans travel on motorcycles and bicycles, both of which can be hired through hotels.

There are no domestic flights; visitors can travel between the islands by boat. A limited number of taxis and minibuses operate in Tuvalu.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are

recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.

There were 1,000 tourist arrivals in 2011.



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