

THE UNSPOILT ISLANDS OF HA'APAI, TONGA



Kelelesia beach – uninhabited & all to yourself!

Adina spent two weeks sailing through the beautiful islands of Ha'apai, Tonga in September 2014. Most sailors seem happy to spend their time in the northern islands of Vava'u and then head off to Fiji – little do they know they are missing out on some real gems just 55 nautical miles south!

We visited 7 Ha'apai islands and we'd simply agree with the intrepid before us who have said it's the unspoilt South Pacific they'd been looking for but had feared is now gone in our modern world. Stories of it being decimated by cyclones, littered with dangerous reefs and lacking sheltered anchorages are all just that – stories! If you can sail the Tuamotos, and use the same common sense and caution you can enjoy the Ha'apai.

What it is

Lots of small beautiful islands, excellent white beaches, good snorkelling, pristine/unspoilt, mostly uninhabited and you can have an island all to yourself. We didn't dive but apparently there is some good diving too. And as for whales, well the Ha'apai has them in abundance!

What it is not/things to watch for

The islands have no outlying enclosed reef to provide perfect protection like the Society Islands. The islands are low lying and shelter is provided by the small islands/reef. Very similar to the Tuamotos, you need to pick your spot carefully if the trade winds get above 15kts or the wind goes west/north etc. In the winds we had above 15kts it was a little bumpy but nothing to worry about. Reefs are the main danger so eyeball navigation is important but you will easily see breakers on the reefs, colour changes in the shallows etc; arrive with the sun overhead and ideally at low tide if possible. Watch out for whales! You'll likely be alone - of our two weeks in the Ha'apai we had only two nights with other boats. Excluding Pangai and Uoleva, no wifi! And phone reception ran out about 10 miles south of Pangai. Bliss.

Anchoring

All excellent in sand amongst bommies/coral.

Provisioning

This is possible in Pangai and Haafeva but best to provision in Neiafu before heading south or Nuku'alofa if heading north.

Navigation

We used Ken's Comprehensive Cruising Guide for the Kingdom of Tonga, an excellent reference as waypoints are spot on, just a little biased in his choice of anchorages. We used our Navionics charts which were largely accurate though just a little out throughout Tonga. We also downloaded satellite images using google maps which were very helpful in picking anchorage spots away from reef/bommies.



SY Adina protected by reef off the island of O'ua

Pangai

Anchor left or right of the harbour entrance, Navionics is good, eyeballs are needed for spotting reefs on the approach, check in and out at the same time with customs (they will do this), we did Mariners Cafe for wifi and simple lunch. With little to hold us we pushed straight on to Uoleva Island, 5 miles to the south.

Uoleva Island

Long beautiful island. Ignore Ken's Guide anchorage point, aim for the middle and get as close to the beach as you like. We recommend Craig and Kristin at 'Uoleva Yacht Club' - relaxed, low key bar on the beach, if you can get a few people together ask them to do one of their fabulous barbecues. They offer whale watching and diving. Craig is a good source of local sailing information.



Kristin and Craig's Uoleva BBQ

Tofanga Island - 19.57.49S, 174.28.26W

Nice beach, best shell collecting, isolated, lagoon for snorkelling, simply lovely, you'd almost expect to stumble into Robinson Crusoe!

Limu Island - 20.01.46S, 174.27.86W

Anchorage a little way off the island so bumpy in winds above 12kts, stopping place for fishermen. OK.

O'ua - 20.02.85S, 174.40.95W well sheltered

Ignore Navionics (it will show you anchored on reef), Ken's waypoints are spot on, village for exploring, people very polite. We had lunch with a family and attended one of the 5 churches - beautiful singing.

Nomuka Iki - 20.16.614S, 174.48.245W

'Must do', lovely beach, shells, good snorkelling/fishing south side of island.

Kelefesia - 20.03.09S, 174.44.40W

'Absolute must do', we went west of all hazards and turned 90 degrees to approach using Ken's waypoints. Entry between reefs can be seen by breakers on reef, about 150m wide. Ideally time arrival for low tide/good light so you can see any hazards. Can be roly, Catamarans will be smug! Walk/wade around the island. Baby black tips on south. Paradise!



Nomuka Iki sunset



Tofanga Island sand cay

Once you're done with the Ha'apai head down to Nuku'alofa, anchor off Pangaimotu island outside Big Mama's Yacht Club, enjoy an ice-cold drink, some good food, get on the best wifi in the Pacific and post all those pictures home!

We'd be happy to provide more information or contact Craig who lives on Uoleva - info@uoleva.com

Tom and Susie

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