

Westward II Cruising Notes

Tuvalu

November – December 2012

This is information gathered and our observations for the areas we have travelled.

It is for information purposes only. Do not use for navigational purposes.

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1 Tuvalu

1.1 General

Tuvalu is a group of nine atolls, formerly known as the Ellice Islands.

The currency is Australian dollars. There are banks that can exchange currency, however no ATM machines.

Time zone is +12 UTC.

The locals ferment 'toddy' in the coconut palms, and you will often be asked to join them for some.

1.2 Clearance

Funafuti Atoll is the only clearance port in Tuvalu. Refer section on Funafuti Atoll for details.

1.2.1 Extensions and Renewals

We did not get an extension beyond our 1-month; however, on enquiries for \$30 you can obtain a 1-month extension. I am not sure how many times this is possible.

2 Funafuti Atoll

2.1 General

Funafuti Atoll is the main centre in Tuvalu.

Everyone gets around on mopeds with very relaxed road rules. The airport is a hub of activity, while not in use (which is most of the time) it is a road, sports ground, meeting area. On hot nights the locals will sometimes bring out sleeping mats and sleep there.

2.2 In and Out

We entered the lagoon via the Te Avo Fuagea passage (the western pass) – it is narrow but has plenty of depth. We left via Te Avo I De Lape passage (the northern pass).

2.2.1 Inward Clearance

On arrival, we anchored off the government buildings (the biggest building you will see). After getting no response on VHF16, we took the dinghy ashore (there is a small jetty near government offices).

In the government building, we went to immigration, receiving a 1-month visa after completion of entry form. (Extensions are available for AUD 30). Quarantine is in the same building, and after another quick form this was complete.

For customs clearance we had to go to the port. We walked as were told it is only a couple of minutes down the road, in hindsight we should have taken the dinghy, as it was quite some way more than a couple of minutes on foot.

Clearance was quick and easy and there were absolutely no charges. The first free country for entry we have come across. Apart from the stamp in our passport, we received no paper.

2.2.2 Outward

Outward clearance is also at Funafuti – Immigration at the Government Building, Customs at the Port.

We had written a letter to customs requesting permission to stop at some of the northern islands. We submitted this to the customs office in the Government Building. Once our clearance paperwork was complete, they gave us letters for each of the islands we had requested, allowing us to visit these islands on the way north to Kiribati. The atolls we requested permission to visit were Nukefetau and Nanumea.

2.3 HF Radio

Rag of the air from Fiji @ 19:00 UTC on 8173.0 – Jim at Also Island. Good weather coverage and will do spot forecast for you as well as passage reporting.

2.4 Anchorage

2.4.1 Vaiaku Anchorage

Waypoint: 08°31.489'S 179°11.389°E.

This is the anchorage near the Government Building. We found this to be a good anchorage with good holding. We did not have any westerly winds while there, however there would be little protection from this direction. The small jetty near the Government Building was good to leave dinghy when ashore.

2.4.2 Funafala Island Anchorage

Waypoint: 08°36.813'S 179°05.642'E.

This was a good anchorage with a small friendly village ashore to visit.

2.4.3 Conservation Area

There is a conservation area in the south western side of the atoll. There is no fishing, and to anchor you need to get permission and pay a fee. The permit you obtain from the town council for \$50 per group. We couldn't get consistent information on where we could anchor, or how long the fee covered you for. We therefore did not proceed with a permit and did not visit this area of the atoll.

2.5 About the Place

2.5.1 Services

Basic services are available.

We got diesel from Pacific Energy for \$1.90 AUD per litre. The wharf is good to tie up to at high tide; it has large nylon fending strips. They brought out a fuel truck to us.

Unleaded was available for \$2.00 and outboard mix for \$2.45.

There are a couple of internet cafes. We generally went to Filamona Lodge as can logon with own PC's.

There is mobile phone coverage and we purchased a SIM card for our phone. Calls were quite expensive back to Australia and New Zealand.

2.5.2 Provisioning

There are a number of supermarkets and small stores, where you can purchase most food items. The challenge is fresh fruit and vegetables, as are mostly imported and look a bit tired by the time they hit the supermarket fruit and vegetable section.

There is a Korean garden that you can get fruit and vegetables from on a Friday morning. Need to be there early to get a good number. Then you purchase a pile of fruit and vegetables when your turn comes up. Everything was charged at \$3/kilo.

You may be able to purchase from the Korean gardens at other times, but we did not make further enquiries.

2.5.3 Wining and Dining

We found a couple of restaurants with cheap and cheerful meals. Do not expect anything too fancy.

There is the Filamona Lodge, The Blue Ocean Restaurant, and Vaiaku Hotel.

There is the sunset bar at the end of the island where you can get a cold beer, but they do not serve meals.

2.5.4 Site-seeing / Activities

Visit the information centre on the second floor (northern side) of the Government Building. They do not have much information, but do have handy maps on where the main sites and services are.

We hired a moped for \$5 for return the same day. To keep 24 hours is \$10 AUD. We went from one end of the island to the other in no time. No helmets are required and road rules appear to be optional. You can use the moped to carry all sorts of goods, babies, baby baths, pushbikes, luggage and more – and they can carry up to 4 people! (All of the above witnessed by us, although we did not attempt ourselves).

There is a Philatelic Society that we found interesting. It is amazing the volume of stamps on display. We bought some to send back to stamp collecting friends at home.

Visit the airport when a plane is coming in. The place is humming. Fire Engines drive down the runway, sirens blaring to get people off, although the last minute mopeds still zoom across. Nothing like a good game of chicken ...

2.6 Diving and Snorkeling

The diving and snorkeling inside the lagoon was ordinary. On the couple of dives we did, the coral looked silted and washed-out – mainly stag-horn coral – with small fishes near the coral heads.

We did some drift dives through the passes, both on the incoming and outgoing tide. Luckily, there was another yacht around with one diver on board, so we took it in turns to sit in the dinghy. The current was quite strong and you got a bit of speed up! We saw plenty of fishes, both big and small, and some large schools. We saw turtles who were not at all worried by our presence, and a few sharks – mainly reef shark, hump-head Maori wrasse, moray eels, and more.

The passes we dived were Te Ava PuaPua Pass and Te Aa Mateiko Pass.

3 Nukefetau Atoll

3.1 General

This is 87nm from Funafuti; we did it as an overnight passage.

We didn't connect as well with the local community here as we have in other places. They seemed quite lethargic and didn't engage with us much at all.

3.2 In and Out

We entered the lagoon through Teafua Pass.

These are some waypoints provided by SV Renata for entry into the lagoon.

Passage:

1	Outside	07°59.637S	178°19.324E
2	Middle	08°00.167S	178°19.922E
3	Inside	08°00.582S	178°20.450E
4	On the way to village	08°01.105S	178°20.327E
5	Anchorage near village	08°01.296S	178°19.3E

On arrival went to police station to give our letter from customs.

3.3 Anchorage

WE anchored in several locations, waypoints are:

North East	07°58.572'S 178°25.550'E	16m
North West	07°56.208'S 178°22.659'E	8m
Mid West	07°59.555'S 178°20.659'E	
Village	08°01.964'S 178°19.656'E	15m

We moved around a bit based on wind direction. We found we you could get protection from all winds, but a strong westerly uncomfortable at high tide even in the best of spots.

The water was much clearer in the NW corner, but had to pick your way through bommies to sandy patch on southern side of island. We had NE winds while here so was okay, except for small roll right at high tide. Also, this was a conservation area, so no fishing allowed.

3.4 About the Place

3.4.1 Services

There is Internet at the government station at the telecom building. You can take your laptop and costs approximately \$5 for 49 minutes.

There is a bank where you can change money, but no ATM machine.

Fuel supplies were low on the island, and we did not need any so were okay.

3.4.2 Provisioning

There are several small shops with basic staple foods. The supply ship comes from Fiji, and this was delayed due to the recent cyclone Evan, so shelves very bare.

3.5 Diving and Snorkeling

We snorkeled and found some interesting bommies and channels. We got 'approached' by a school of 15 sharks while snorkeling in Deafatule passage. We decided to make a hasty retreat to the dinghy.

We did not dive as would have had to go outside the reef and the seas were big.

4 Nanumea

4.1 General

Nanumea is some 200nm to the north of Nukefetau.

We found the locals welcoming and friendly.

4.2 In and Out

The entrance is a narrow channel, blasted through the reef. It is well marked and reported to have a depth of 2m at low tide (on lagoon side of channel) – on entry we had 3m on mid-tide. There is also quite a strong tidal flow through the channel to watch out for.

These are the waypoints from SV Celcius:

Outside channel: 05°40.380'S 176°06.368'E

Inside channel: 05°40.120'S 176°06.552'E

On arrival the police paddled out to us to ask for our letter from customs. We handed this over and were immediately welcomed.

Anchorage

Waypoint: 05°40.256'S 176°07.081'E

The anchorage was nice and calm, protected from 3 sides by island and reef on the other.

4.3 About the Place

4.3.1 Services

Internet is available in the telecom building, \$5 for 49 minutes, and can use your own laptop.

There is no ATM, however can exchange money at the bank.

Petrol is available from some local stores.

4.3.2 Provisioning

There are a lot of small stores with basic supplies only.

No wining or dining other than with local village people.

4.3.3 Site-seeing / Activities

Go to the church and climb the stairwell in the belfry tower – it has a great view.

The church has beautiful lead-light windows.

4.4 Diving and Snorkeling

Snorkeling inside was interesting and shallow. The water was extremely warm, only saw small fish.

We went to southern end of lagoon. We snorkeled on the outside reef, but very sandy and sloping away. It was not that interesting so we did not go back for a dive.