EXPLORE NUKU’ALOFA - 1 HR WALKING TRAIL

Vuna Wharf (Cruise Ships)

Vuna Wharf - Visitor Centre

Duration: 1 hour

Vuna Wharf was built in 1895, and for some 60 years most visitors to Tonga disembarked from ships that tied up here. A railroad once ran through town along Railway Road to transport copra and other crops to Vuna Wharf. These days Vuna Wharf is used for visiting cruise liners and super yachts enjoying the wonderful cruising grounds around Tonga.

Leave Vuna Wharf and turn right on Vuna Road

You will see the Treasure Building across the road. Constructed in 1928, it is a fine example of South Pacific colonial architecture. Early in its life it housed the Tongan Customs Service and the Post Office as well as the Treasury Department.

Continue along Vuna Road

Following the bend, on your right you will see the big field called Panga Lahi. This Royal land is owned by the King. The name Panga is referred to a special space for the King. This field is only for Royal and Government events such as Royal feasts, royal ceremonies and parades.

Beyond the Panga Lahi you will see the Royal Palace, the official residence of the King of Tonga. Nuku’alofa’s white Victorian wooden Palace was commissioned by King George Tupou I. The Palace was prefabricated in New Zealand, shipped to Tonga, and erected in 1887.

Historically, this is Kaukapula (junior rank of the King’s Image) would stop here on his way from Minato (west) to Manuka (east). The original Maika’s Panga (green lawn next to Palace) was the burial ground for the vanished warriors of the Northern group of Vava’u and Vava’u who died helping King George Tupou I conquer Tongatapu.

Although the Palace is not open to the public, it is easily visible from the waterfront and makes a great photograph. Generally, the present King George Tupou V and his family do not live at the Palace and instead use it for ‘official functions’, with parts of the Palace now used to house the Royal Archives and artworks.

Continue along Vuna Road

You will arrive at a large tree in front of the Westpac Bank. This is the Raintree Square, and this tree is believed to be already there during World War 2 (1941). The park benches at the base of the tree are a local gathering place.

After the Raintree Square there is the newly renovated Post Office with the old Post Office now moved to Vodafone. Across the street stands the coloimpa, the Prime Minister’s Office with its quaint tower and the oldest Government building. The glass building next door where is Cabinet is held.

Turn right onto Salote Road (good coffee on the corner)

The third building on the left is the Nuku’alofa Club, another hold over from the old colonial South Pacific. It’s a private club where Tonga’s elite makes gathering to relax over a game of snooker and a few beers. The rest of the block runs behind the Royal Palace.

Maika’s A Kia is a short distance south of the Royal Palace along the Vuna Road (King’s Road). King’s Road is the official name for the main road that runs from the original meeting is the last road every Tongan King will travel during his reign, toward his resting place at Matafonua.

King Salote (George) Tupou I’s tomb is positioned in the middle of the field, so that we can see if it hiding under the palace grounds straight along the Ha’ata Tui.

The word maika’s means village green, park, playground, etc.

During the middle of the 20th century expatriates in Tonga used the area as a golf course. After Queen Salote had died and was buried there, the Maika’s A Kia is now considered a sacred site. You are not allowed to go inside the fence.

Along Salote Road

Walk down until you get to the next intersection, on the corner of Tui Road is the Basilica Centennial Church, Free Church of Tonga. Built out of concrete blocks in 1938, it is a magnificent example of early Tongan church architecture. The church was established in 1865 by King George Tupou I (formerly Tala’au’a Tupou I) and Rev. Shively W. Baker. Originally with the name The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, it became the official state church. Queen Salote and King Tupou IV were both christened in the Free Church of Tonga. The church operates three high schools, one each in Tongatapu, Ha’apai and Vava’u, all named Talitau College.

Continue till you reach the intersection with Taufa’ahau Road

When you reach Taufa’ahau Road you will see diagonally across the road is the remains of St. Anthony of Padua, the first basilica in the South Pacific islands.

Much of this impressive building was constructed by volunteer labour brought from the islands, which were under German occupation, showing the wonderful show of light through the stained glass windows. The large wooden beams were imported from New Zealand with the smaller columns sourced from the Royal estate on Tui. Beam joints are tradition covered with coconut mats woven locally.

Turning left into Taufa’ahau Road you will walk through the retail centre of Nuku’alofa.

On the right you will find (next door to Friends Cafe), the Langatonga Handicrafts Centre. The clapboard house was built by William Cocker, a local merchant, for his five daughters, who lived in New Zealand, but spent each winter in Nuku’alofa. Here you will find a large area or local handicrafts, with one elderly woman who lived in Europe in 1953 with the vision to ‘Work in one accord’. ‘Ngaote iilo ta pa’o’).

To the left is the St. Mary’s Catholic Church which was one of the original churches in the town, and the houses in the church were later used by religious orders.

Next turn, right on Salote Road

Walk past the Police Station on the left to Maeketi Talamahu in the second block, the lively produce market where vendors sell a great variety of fresh produce, ranging from huge taro roots and watermelons to string beans and bananas. Tongatapu’s climate is cool enough during the winter months so many of these crops grow in great bounty.

At the back of the market and upstreet, there are many stalls carrying locally produced handicraft items, such as tapa cloth, straw baskets, mats and jewellery etc.

Take some time to look around the market and enjoy some locally grown fruits or sipping on a fresh young coconut.

After visiting the market come back to Railway Road

The colonial-era wooden structure on the right on the first block serves as the Town Hall. Historically, the Parliament was opened on 16th September, 1875. It seemed to be idealised and modelled on the earlier Fakafaka which was once upon a time, a council of chiefs that ruled the island of Tongatapu.

The creation of Parliament together with the Tongan Constitution was important in order to safeguard Tonga’s sovereignty. After the First World War, the Parliament was composed of: Government - the premier, the minister for land, administration, police, nine representatives from Tongatapu, five from Ha’apai, four from Vava’u, one from Niutupupatu and from Nuku’u. They were appointed by the King for the first 20 years and twenty people’s representatives elected along the same regional lines as notaries. The Speaker was appointed by the King.

The building was built in 1894. In the old system it would open from June-November (the end of the financial year), and things have to be approved before 1st of July. Today Parliament is more flexible, especially if there is an urgent government work to get done or a call to order.

Elections take place every 4 years. Session opens are to the public, tours can be organised for visitors ahead, however everyone that enters must be producing valid government document.

The brown block building at the back is the Supreme Court House. There are 3 Supreme Courts and also 3 Magistrate Courts. One is in Fatu Hiva, another in Vava’u and the last one is based in Nuku’u. There are about 40 lawyers in Tonga.

The large lawn area is called Pangai Sali, Pangai is it’s name and Sali meaning small. This land is owned by Government and is used for Government and Royal events only. There is a great windbreak in the middle of the lawn, this is where the soldiers band would stand on 2 special occasions because of the strong wind here. On the other side of the lawn you will find a Tongan War Memorial honouring Tonganos who served in both World Wars.

Turn right onto Vuna Road and continue along the main road to the right, you will come to the Old Bank where this concludes your tour of Nuku’aloa. Come in and make sure you don’t leave without a piece of Tongan memorabilia.